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① THE SECRET FRATERNITIES

OF THE

MIDDLE AGES.

THE ARNOLD PRIZE ESSAY FOR 1865,

READ IN THE THEATRE, OXFORD,

JUNE 21, 1865.

BY

AMERICO PALFREY MARRAS, B.A.

LATE SCHOLAR OF LINCOLN COLLEGE.

"Amor fraterno."

London,

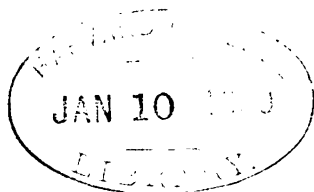
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SYLLABUS.

	PAGE
I. Introduction	1
II. The Ancient Mysteries	7
III. The Gnostics, and the Sects connected with them .	15
IV. The Ismailites and Assassins	31
V. The Vehmgerichte, or Secret Tribunals of Westphalia	42
VI. The Knights Templars	58
VII. Origin of Freemasonry	73
VIII. Rosicrucianism, the Parent of Freemasonry . .	78
IX. Conclusion	88

„ Ewig aus der Wahrheit Schranken
Schweift des Mannes wilde Kraft ;
Unstätt treiben die Gedanken
Auf dem Meer der Leidenschaft ;
Gierig greift er in die Ferne,
Nimmer wird sein Herz gestillt ;
Rastlos durch entlegne Sterne
Sagt er seines Traumes Bild.“

Schiller. Würde der Frauen.

THE SECRET FRATERNITIES

OF

THE MIDDLE AGES.

“Ourselves are full
Of social wrong ; and maybe wildest dreams
Are but the needful preludes of the truth :
This fine old world of ours is but a child
Yet in the go-cart. Patience ! Give it time
To learn its limbs : there is a hand that guides.”

Tennyson. The Princess.

I.

THE mystery which veils the history of secret fraternities excites a deeper feeling than that of a mere fleeting curiosity, but the study of the doctrines and principles of such associations is not easy, and many obstacles beset the path of the inquirer. From the very essence of these societies, the initiated are bound by their oath to silence on all important matters, while the uninitiated are unable to obtain any knowledge of them. Most of the writers who treat of them, inveigh against them with all their eloquence, while the rest have as zealously praised them. Such fraternities naturally leave but few

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records; their instructions and proceedings are not written, but handed down orally, and this, added to the extravagant claims to antiquity, which the initiated have asserted for many of them, has not a little contributed to the obscurity which hangs over their origin; and the very fact of their secrecy has always brought suspicion upon them, and has given rise to the most unfounded accusations against them. So interesting a subject, however, could not fail to attract the attention of learned men; and especially in Germany, the land of mysticism and *illuminati*, many writers have thrown some light on the history of such associations.

Secret fraternities have probably existed at all times, and among all peoples; they have always been the expression of the exigencies or tendencies of the ages in which they have been formed. To write their history, therefore, is to describe such exigencies and to investigate such tendencies. Their character has varied according to the different periods and nations in which they have arisen, and this may be perceived in the different objects they have had in view. We always find that in the bosom of secret fraternities a refuge has been sought for those ideas, which although publicly proscribed, have, nevertheless, remained indelible in the thoughts of men. Those doctrines for which the multitude is not ripe, appear in them under the guise of mysteries and symbols, the perfect knowledge of which is only to be attained after repeated trials, and after having passed through successive degrees of initiation.

Most secret societies owe their existence to some irresistible impulse of the human mind, and have been progressive in their tendencies.

They might be compared to so many centres of civilization, where, in the midst of mysterious ceremonies, the sacred fire has been preserved which was destined to illuminate the future, and which, without these wise precautions, might have

been utterly extinguished in the midst of dark and barbaric ages, and of nations still immersed in gross ignorance. But sometimes, though less often, these secret associations have been animated by a spirit which has not kept pace with the progress of the age, and have become, instead of promoters of truth and enlightenment, the arsenals of sedition and fanaticism.

It is thus, perhaps, that the majority of those who are members of these societies become mere blind instruments in the hands of ambitious men.

This will explain how reason and inquiry, as well as a retrograde spirit, how liberty as well as despotism, have so often found representatives in secret associations. The history of the most ancient civilized peoples, as well as of those of more modern times, presents numerous instances of the origin, and of the too frequent degeneration of such fraternities.

The rise and progress of those which have had a political object, is, perhaps, not difficult to trace.

All human society is originally composed of two separate and distinct elements, the patriarch or ruler who commands, and the people who obey. At first, these elements exist for a long time without their different interests clashing; the chief as well as the people have respectively recognized rights, and recognized duties. The condition of each of them is distinctly established and understood, and nothing threatens the authority of the former, nothing shakes the fidelity of the latter.

But when nomad hordes begin to form permanent settlements, and wandering tribes begin to dwell within the walls of cities, the total change of life and manners produces disorder in the midst of these newly created nations; rights and duties are confounded, and all men recognize the necessity of some check, in order to save these new societies from ruin. Law then rises up to consecrate rights, to define obligations, and to become the guardian of liberty.

Laws must no doubt have varied according to the different conditions of peoples, yet it is evident that the attention of an early legislator must have been directed to the fact of the different positions of ruler and people, and that he must have respected them in their whole extent of reciprocal rights and duties.

The character of early laws was perfectly adapted to new peoples: they were precise and to the point; for men scarcely emerged from savage life their interpretation was easy, they were quickly understood, and as rapidly applied. Thus, all knew what rights were to be respected, what duties were to be fulfilled, and within what limits liberty could be exercised. But the term liberty has been very differently interpreted, and it is this difference which has caused most of the revolutions which have stained with blood the annals of ancient and modern history.

There is in all governments an unceasing struggle, open or secret, between authority and liberty¹; the chief who for his strength or skill as a warrior was chosen to govern the people, would be supported by his friends and adherents; but there ever remained a discontented party in the state, envious of the power they were eager to possess. As long as the law was respected there could be no cause for conspiracy, but if once law was violated, or the legitimacy of the government was contested, if weak or corrupt rulers knew not how to retain a power which was imperceptibly slipping from their grasp, then anarchy commenced, the discontented combined and revolted; every thing was transformed, and when the revolution was completed, new liberties or new tyrannies signalized the accession of the triumphant party.

If the various and infinite causes, the concurrence of which brings about a revolution in a state, whatever may happen to be the form of its government, were properly estimated, men

¹ See Hume, "Essay on Civil Government."

would not be surprised at the variety, and number of critical periods which have disturbed the tranquillity of different ages. Corruption, tyranny, superstition, have all in turn threatened the existence of societies, and have in turn produced the very events which have saved them. The varied character of revolutions may no doubt be traced to the different instincts of peoples, and the different nature of countries; but there are some general causes which have always produced them, and have ever powerfully contributed to their success. Every where tyranny is hateful to true patriotism, at all times superstition has been looked upon with disgust by wise and enlightened men; and in the histories of peoples it will be found that where tyranny has raised its throne, or superstition has endeavoured to establish itself as supreme, there revolutions have begun their work, and, having made their way through all obstacles, have at length victoriously repelled them.

It is a remarkable fact that the higher classes in the state have ever been the first to initiate revolutionary ideas, and only when they have attained to political freedom have become conservative; the middle classes have then taken up the ideas of progress, and when these have in turn achieved enfranchisement, the lower classes have adopted their principles.

The history of Secret Fraternities shows the same gradation; but it must be remembered that in the Middle Ages, the people, as an element of power in the state, had scarcely any existence. Feudalism gave its peculiar colouring to the secret societies of that period, and the initiated belonged chiefly to the order of the aristocracy.

Few revolutions have been effected openly and spontaneously; for the most part they are prepared silently and mysteriously long before the actual event.

First bold minorities unite, then the discontented join them, they meet, discuss their plans, and what at first was but a cry of grief and indignation soon becomes a watchword for all; the

different members exhort each other to an enterprise of which the danger lies hid in its mystery, the minds of all are carried away by enthusiasm, and the conspiracy bursts forth. This is the history of most secret societies which have had a mere political object.

In countries in which the government emanates from the people, such associations cannot exist; but where the multitude of men have been condemned to social and political nullity, they have afforded the only means of discussing their wrongs and of endeavouring to discover remedies for them; they however threaten the existence of the governments they condemn, and are too often destructive of all social order. Such fraternities, even though at the commencement they have had no ulterior design against the government, are obliged for their own security to adopt a secret organization with initiatory rites, oaths, and ceremonies, passwords, and countersigns, in order that no one unless a member should be present at their deliberations; and many associations have been rendered secret by the very persecutions they have suffered. Most secret fraternities, if not originally political, have eventually become so; for even when only a reform in religion has been contemplated, they may be said to have had a political character, so intimately is religion connected with the civil institutions of a state.

The nature of others has been religious or philosophical rather than political.

At a time when the general intelligence of mankind was not sufficient to understand the truths of religion or philosophy in their naked simplicity, and when it would have been even dangerous to teach them openly, men formed secret associations to guard and preserve them until they could be safely revealed².

² Condorcet, "*Esquisse d'un Tableau du Progrès de l'Esprit humain*," p. 170, says:—

"Nous examinerons si, dans un temps où le prosélytisme philosophique eût été

If we possessed more accurate knowledge of the nature of the ancient mysteries, we might hope to find that such in many cases was their original character; but on this subject mere speculation has almost entirely taken the place of history, and even the history of the fraternities of the Middle Ages can only be imperfectly gathered; many of the circumstances seem to baffle all inquiry, and may probably never be fully ascertained.

Yet the study of their origin, their progress, and their doctrines, will prove deeply interesting to the philosopher and to the historian, who will find in them the mirror of the secret thoughts and aspirations of the different periods during which they were organized.

The human mind is ever restless, ever in progress, attracted by a secret instinct to discover new paths by which it may arrive at truth. Its uncertainties, its gropings in the dark, its difficult yet indefatigable researches, are all reproduced more or less exactly in secret societies; and it is in them alone that are to be found the traditions of efforts ever renewed, yet incessantly doomed to failure and contempt. Thus the history of secret societies presents a vast panorama, affording a general view of the operations of the human mind: philosophy, religion, statecraft, separate, mingled, or confounded; on one side, self-sacrifice; on another, egotism; on another, ambition; every where a desire for innovation and reform.

II.

Before examining the secret fraternities of the Middle Ages, it may be interesting to glance at those which have preceded them.

Man might with good reason be called a mystery-loving animal, for at all times mystery has exercised over the human mind an irresistible attraction; and ambitious men have never

si dangereux, il ne se forma pas des sociétés secrètes destinées à perpétuer sourdement et sans danger parmi quelques adeptes, un petit nombre de vérités simples, comme des surs préservatifs contre les préjugés dominateurs."

succeeded so well in influencing their fellow-creatures as when, surrounding themselves with a veil of secrecy, they have spoken of hidden truths, only to be obtained by great labour and blind obedience.

Some authors have attempted to show, that all secret fraternities form but the successive links of one unbroken chain, and have declared that the esoteric doctrines which in Egypt, in Persia, and in Greece preserved the speculations of the wise from the ears and tongues of an illiterate multitude, passed with slight modifications into the possession of the early Christian heretics; from the Gnostic schools of Syria and Egypt to their successors the Manichæans; and that from these through the Paulicians, Albigenses, and Templars, they have been bequeathed to the modern Freemasons³. This theory however would seem to be improbable. Doubtless contemporaneous and successive secret fraternities must have had some influence on each other, and the ceremonies of probation and initiation are no doubt in many cases mere imitations of older originals, and the forms of expression are frequently almost identical; but it would be wrong to assume, because certain fraternities, existing at different epochs, have made use of similar or cognate metaphors in order to designate their secret proceedings, that therefore these proceedings are identical. Similar circumstances are constantly producing similar results; and as all secret fraternities are, in respect of their secrecy, in the same situation, they are all obliged to express in their symbolical language that relation of contrast to the uninitiated on which their constitution depends. To denote this contrast metaphorical analogies will be employed, and these analogies will be sought in the contrasts of outward nature, as in

³ See in support of this view: Higgins, "Anacalypsis," vol. ii. p. 388. Clavel, "Histoire Pittoresque de la Franc-Maçonnerie." Rossetti, "Sullo Spirito Antipapale." Barruel, "Mémoires du Jacobinisme." Hammer, "Geschichte der Assassinen."

the opposition of light to darkness, warmth to cold, life to death.

The operations of the ordinary passions of our nature will also require the occasional use of metaphors; and as the prominent objects of the material universe are always at hand, the same comparisons may sometimes be employed by persons who have never dreamt of initiatory rites and secret associations.

Without therefore adopting the idea that the doctrines of secret fraternities have been handed down in regular succession from the first to the last, it may perhaps be said that the mysteries of the ancient world are important with regard to the secret societies of the Middle Ages, from their having been the first examples of such associations, and from their having been the model of all later initiations. A striking resemblance has been traced in the reception of a Freemason into one of the superior ranks of the craft, and in the initiation of a novice into the mysteries of Isis ⁴.

Of all the nations of antiquity, Egypt was, it should seem, the most inclined to mystery, and this tendency may be perceived in the relics of her religion, philosophy, literature, and art. In early times, when the ministers of religion governed the people, they thought it necessary in order to preserve the privileges of their sacred order, to conceal themselves in the gloomy depths of some impenetrable sanctuary; and by means of mysteries obtained a powerful religious influence over the minds of the people. In Egypt the origin is to be found of those divisions of the initiated into different degrees, which have in all ages and in all countries proved so mighty an engine in stimulating the zeal of the aspirant to science or to power. The very name of ancient Egypt has become almost synonymous with what is dark or occult, and, in later times, the Alexandrian school displayed the same reverence for the

⁴ See "Le Tombeau de Jacques Molai," by Cadet de Gassicourt, p. 96.

mystical which had distinguished its predecessors. In India a particular class of Brahmins monopolized learning and the offices of religion, and covered their doctrines from the scrutiny of the vulgar under the cloak of a sacred language, each generation transmitting to the following one the mystic doctrines of the order.

The celebrated mysteries of Greece were of Egyptian origin ; of these the Eleusinian were the most important, and in the trials which the neophyte suffered during his probation, may be traced the ceremonies of initiation which have been more or less adopted by later secret societies. It is said that scenic representations were given of the rewards and punishments of Elysium and Tartarus, and that at one moment the candidate found himself in a blaze of light, at another immersed in sudden gloom ; while the earth groaned and trembled beneath his feet, and unearthly phantoms appeared and vanished, leaving the aspirant agitated with wonder and fear. If the drama of Eleusis were represented in these days, it would most assuredly only seem to us a mere show ; but we cannot doubt the numerous testimonies of those who describe the excellent effects and the moral influence of these solemn ceremonies in ancient times⁵.

Pindar says of the Mysteries of Ceres, "Happy is he, who, having beheld these ceremonies, descends into the depths of the earth. He knows the *end* of life, he knows its divine origin⁶."

Cicero considers them the greatest benefit which Athens had conferred upon mankind, as not only teaching men how to live happily, but also how to die with the consoling hope of a better future.

The Pythagoreans, the best and the purest of the Greeks,

⁵ Renan, "*Études d'Histoire Religieuse*," p. 37.

⁶ See also Cesare Cantù, "*Hist. Univ.*," t. i. p. 259. Andocides, "*De Myst.*," § 31. Isocrates, "*Panegy.*," c. vi.

were closely connected with these mysteries, and thus also bear testimony to their excellence.

In Persia, Zoroaster is believed to have introduced the Egyptian mysteries; the probation of the novices resembled that of Eleusis, but was longer and more severe. In the Mithraic rites the candidate was admitted by a ceremony of baptism, after having been subjected to a series of trials during forty days. The Magi enveloped their science and religion in profound obscurity, and concealed from all but a chosen few those truths which were held too sacred for ordinary men.

In China, from the earliest historical period down to the present day, there have been secret associations.

The Romans adopted the religious ceremonies of many of the nations they conquered, and engrafted their rites and mysteries upon their own simple worship; the Dionysia, when introduced into Rome, degenerated into the libidinous excesses of the Bacchanalia.

The Druids, like the Egyptian priests, pretended to be the possessors of all knowledge, and are supposed to have had two distinct doctrines, one for the vulgar, and another for the initiated.

The Jewish Rabbis ascribed to themselves the possession of the Cabala, or mysterious and awful traditions which it was forbidden to commit to writing, but which were handed down through chosen personages of each generation. The common origin of the mysteries of antiquity is clearly shown by the fact that the same conspicuous objects form equally in Egypt, Greece, India, and Rome, an essential part of the mystic ritual; hence it is probable that, in the early celebration of the mysteries, religious ceremonies were united with philosophical instruction⁷.

The mysteries should be viewed as being the new form

⁷ Sainte-Croix, "*Recherches sur les Mystères*," p. 182. Creuzer, "*Symb. und Myth.*," iv. p. 512.

which the religions of antiquity assumed, when the simple imaginations of the earliest ages no longer sufficed to satisfy the cravings of the human mind, and when a religion of a more dogmatic and of a more serious character was required⁸.

All the aspirations of mankind tended to monotheism and to a purer religion; and without exaggerating the moral and philosophical influence of the "mysteries," we may say that they powerfully contributed to the preservation of religious tradition and of human morality⁹.

It may be that the priests of Egypt assumed a nobler mission than merely that of terrifying a crowd of ignorant men: perhaps at a time when every independent thought, when every gleam of superior intelligence might seem doomed to extinction at its birth, they may have attempted to rescue a man of intellect from the brutalizing influence of superstition, and to develop his faculties by inviting him, after proper trial of his character, to a share of the knowledge of art and science. If such could be proved to have been the case, mankind would owe them a deep debt of gratitude; but the materials for their history are so scanty and imperfect, that a clear insight into their proceedings cannot be obtained.

Lately, however, an attempt has been made by Röber¹ to explain some of the secrets of the teaching of the Egyptian priests, to which he would apply in the fullest sense of the words the saying of Clemens Alexandrinus with regard to the Eleusinian mysteries, that "there men learnt to know Nature herself."

⁸ Renan, "Études d'Hist. Religieuse," p. 60.

⁹ M. Guignaut, "Religions de l'Antiquité," says, "Longtemps les mystères pacifièrent les âmes par ces augustes cérémonies, qui révélaient la destinée de l'homme dans l'histoire transparente des grandes déesses de l'initiation, et qui le rendaient digne, en le purifiant, de vivre sous leur empire et de partager leur immortalité."

¹ See Friedrich Röber, "Beiträge zur Erforschung der Geometrischen Grundformen in den alten Tempeln Ägyptens," p. 10.

Röber supposes that the secret of the construction of the heptagon triangle² was known to the higher ranks of the priests, and not entrusted to the lower ranks, and he believes that in accordance with their deep respect for the principle of life, and especially for the mystery of the procreation of life, they revered this heptagon triangle as furnishing "the clue to the proportions of all living organisms³," and that they considered it as so interwoven with their religion, that they kept their knowledge of it secret, and only the ground-plans of the sanctuaries in the temples preserved those holy ratios. If this can be proved with certainty, very applicable are the words of an old work attributed to Hermes Trismegistus: "O Egypt, a time will come when, instead of a true religion and a pure worship, thou wilt have only ridiculous fables, incredible to later generations, and only words hewn in stone will remain as the witnesses of thy piety."

The origin of the fraternities of practical Freemasons in the Middle Ages has been ascribed to Egypt, and perhaps the suggestions of Röber may throw some light on their history⁴.

The secret society founded by Pythagoras at Crotona was partly religious and partly political⁵. It resembled the ancient mysteries in having peculiar doctrines that were hidden from the vulgar eye, in the probation of the candidates, and in their division into several classes. The Pythagorean mysteries have been more especially identified with those of Orpheus and Bacchus; and there is a general similarity between them and what we know of the Orphic doctrines.

Pythagoras is said to have taught the unity of the Godhead,

² Röber l. c., "Die Construction des Triangels mit dreifachem Winkel geheim halten."

³ Röber, p. 5. "Schematischer Triangel organischer Gestaltung." Also a paper by Sir William Hamilton, in the "Philosophical Magazine," February 1864, pp. 122—134.

⁴ Röber, "Elementar-Beiträge," p. 80.

⁵ See Bauer, "Geschichte der Philosophie," p. 9.

and to have explained away the whole host of gods, and all their forms of religion, as being merely so many myths and symbols. It is a remarkable fact that all Freemasons who have written the history of their order, connect it with the Druids, who, they say, derived their knowledge from Pythagoras⁶.

The Essenes are described as combining the ascetic virtues of the Pythagorean and the Stoic with a spiritual knowledge of the Divine law; and are said to have had secret initiations and ceremonies. Their name has been interpreted by some as signifying "the silent," "the mysterious;" by others as "the pure." It seems that the annually elected priests of the Ephesian Diana, who during the term of their office had to observe perfect chastity, were called Essenes.

The analogous sect of the Therapeutæ in Egypt lived a solitary life full of privations; they studied the Holy Scriptures as philosophers, and explained them allegorically. The obscurity that hangs over these fraternities may arise from the fact that originally they represented a tendency rather than an organization. The Therapeutæ appear to have been Jews who wished to pass as true followers of Moses, distinct from Christians or Egyptians. From their position in Egypt they were placed under the influence of the schools of Alexandria, and tried to harmonize their doctrines with those of Greece.

The Essenes of Palestine, on the contrary, having less intimate relations with Greece, attached themselves to Oriental doctrines, which they took from the original sources, and which became familiar to them through their connexion with Persia. This influence shows itself especially in the Cabala, which belong to Palestine rather than to Egypt, and which seem to have furnished Gnosticism with some of its principal theories. The idea of emanation is the very soul of Cabalism. This

⁶ Oliver, "Antiquities of Freemasonry," p. 16.

idea, which is entirely foreign to primitive Judaism, forms the most essential characteristic of the religion of Zoroaster; thus it is very probable that the Jews adopted this idea from their relations with Persia.

In the Cabala, as in the system of Zoroaster, all that exists has emanated from the ancient King of Light, a title frequently given to the Creator in the Zendavesta, and in the code of the Sabæans. The King of Light is infinite, He is the only real existence, all the rest is illusion.

In the Cabala as in the Persian and Gnostic doctrines he is the “*πατήρ ἄγνωστος*,” the Almighty hidden from all, sometimes designated by the significant title of “Bythos,” depth.

III.

It is a curious problem whether the Gnostics really had mysteries or not.

It has been said that the Greek mysteries were abolished eighteen hundred years after their establishment, and would have been quite forgotten, but for the fact that some of the sects which originated from Christianity, imitated or revived some of their rites'. Tertullian says the Valentinians borrowed their ceremonies from Eleusis. If we had a better knowledge of what was taught there, it might be possible to show its connexion with the opinions of these heretics.

Münter, in his “*Ecclesiastical Antiquities*,” also observes that in their ceremonies and rites they followed the practices of the ancient mysteries. On the one hand, Gnosticism had numerous relations with the doctrines and rites of Asia, Egypt, and Greece, and on the other, it had emanated from Christianity, and believed itself to be the purest and most sublime form of that religion. Looking at it thus, it seems that it must have had mysteries: the testimonies of the Fathers are positive; Irenæus, speaking of one of the most ancient sects of Gnostics, the Simonians, mentions their *mystici sacerdotes*, and

⁷ Sainte-Croix, “*Recherches sur les Mystères*,” t. ii. p. 187.

says of the Basilidians, that they attributed to their science the power of making them invisible, but adds, "Few know these doctrines, scarce one in a thousand, or two in ten thousand⁸."

The Valentinians were divided into three classes; which seem to indicate so many different degrees of initiatory rites. The popular notion which now exists with regard to the masonic grip was current in the days of Epiphanius as applied to the Gnostics, and it has been suggested that the Gnostic stones or gems were carried about to be produced by one brother to the other, as credentials of his being a member of the fraternity⁹. All the Gnostic schools pretended that they possessed a secret knowledge direct from Jesus Christ, different from that of the Gospels and Epistles, and superior to them, which they regarded as purely exoteric¹⁰. Their doctrines were communicated by emblems and symbols, as the Diagramma of the Ophites shows, and in their teachings they probably imitated the ceremonies and probationary trials of Eleusis.

Gnosticism is as original a doctrine as any other; it is not the ancient mythology, nor the philosophy that had replaced this, nor Christianity, nor any of the known systems of religion; it is in reality, like all systems, the product of a special combination of ideas and requirements.

In the eyes of the Gnostics, Platonism was too limited in its speculations on the intellectual world; it offered too many ideas, and too few real beings; while Christianity seemed to them, on the one hand too practical, and on the other not bold enough in its theories.

This may serve to explain the number of its partisans, and the variety of sects which branched off from it.

It is a strange spectacle to behold the profoundest specula-

⁸ Irenæus, "Advers. Hæres.," i. c. 23.

⁹ King, "Gnostics and their Remains," p. 117.

¹⁰ See Matter, "Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme," the Introduction.

tions of Asia, Egypt, and Greece attacked and overthrown by Christianity, and then to see the old doctrines of the world resuscitated by the Gnostics in a struggle against the conquering religion, and borrowing part of its principles in order to attack the rest more easily. The struggle was a serious one, and had long been prepared.

The ancient and mysterious teachings of Thrace and Samothrace, of Eleusis and Saïs, had joined themselves to the modern doctrines of Greece; and through this fusion, the theories of Egypt, Persia, and Judæa had come into union with the principles of the Academy, and of the Lyceum. Judaism, in the person of Aristobulus, had taken possession of Aristotle, while in Philo it had adopted Platonism. The Essenes and Therapeutæ had united all the sublimest doctrines of the priests of Egypt and of Persia, of Pythagoras and of Plato; and the Cabalists had introduced into their teachings almost all the system of Zoroaster; and finally the new philosophy had invaded Christianity, and brought to it with its language no small share of its idea. Gnosticism is in reality nothing else than the last apparition of the ancient world coming to struggle with its successor, before yielding the human race to it; and even after a conflict of six centuries, though vanquished, it left many traces, for Gnosticism only became extinct in the thirteenth century¹.

The emanation of all spiritual beings from God, the progressive degeneration of these beings from emanation to emanation, the redemption and return of all towards the purity of the Creator, and after the re-establishment of the primitive harmony of all, the truly happy and divine condition of all in the bosom of God, are the fundamental doctrines of Gnosticism.

In this system there is to be found a most singular mixture

¹ Matter, "*Hist. Critique du Gnosticisme.*"

of Monotheism and Pantheism, of Spiritualism and of Materialism, of Christianity and of Heathenism ; but its doctrines were dictated by the spirit of the East, and its language corresponds to its origin ; it is full of imagery ; it has all the grandeur and all the defects of a figurative style.

When Christianity appeared, all the previous systems were becoming more closely related.

From the time of the wars of Alexander, the doctrines of Greece, Egypt, India, and Persia met and mingled ; the barriers which had separated nations were taken away ; and if the peoples of the West willingly joined their creeds to those of the East, the peoples of the East as eagerly hastened to learn the traditions of Greece.

The chief proselytes of Christianity were those who had already sought for truth in many sanctuaries and in many schools. When they adopted a new religion, they no doubt intended to renounce all others ; but, influenced by habits more powerful than their own will, they soon mingled Christianity and philosophy, the apostolic teachings and the traditions of mythology. Later on, other learned men, faithful to the ancient traditions of the schools, introduced even into Christianity the distinction between the esoteric and exoteric doctrines, which the new system had come to destroy ; thus the veil which formerly separated the teachers from the vulgar was again set before the Holy of Holies, although Christianity had shown it rent asunder at the moment that the mission of its Founder was accomplished.

The writings of the Apostles, they said, only taught the articles of the vulgar faith, but the Apostles themselves had transmitted to a few elect the mysteries of knowledge ; these, they affirmed, had been handed down from generation to generation in esoteric traditions ; they gave to these mysteries the name of *Gnosis*, which the Apostles had used to indicate the superiority of knowledge which is given by revelation ;

and thus they attempted to give colour to their assertion of having received this knowledge from the disciples of the Apostles.

The Gnostic schools, which at the commencement of the fifth century of our era had established themselves in Asia Minor, in Syria, in Egypt, in Italy, in Spain, and in Gaul, became extinct in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries.

Although it is perfectly true that even the name of Gnostic disappeared, yet the disappearance of Gnosticism itself was more apparent than real, and neither the legislation of the Empire, nor the power of the Clergy could succeed in annihilating it.

The disorders which arose from the barbarian invasions, and from the Moslem power, greatly favoured the continuation or revival of these sects². All that was prevented, was the rise of any new Gnostic schools, under the same name.

When therefore we speak of the continuation of their doctrines during the Middle Ages, we mean only a secret transmission of certain opinions, either in a number of families whose inner doctrines did not correspond to their outward profession of faith, or in the midst of certain sects which had had relations with the Gnostics.

It was in the ranks of the Manichæans, the Mandaïtes, and other sectaries, that those of the Gnostics who did not become converted to the Church, or did not form new sects, found a refuge. This was natural; for, before its extinction, Gnosticism in the East had introduced some of its principles into Manichæism and Mandaïism; and in the West into the doctrines of the Agapetæ and the Priscillianists³. One of the latest historians of the Templars extends the influence of Gnosticism even to Mohammedanism⁴; but the fact is, that the Gnostics held very different opinions from those of Mohammed with

² Matter, "*Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme*," ii. p. 300.

³ See Gibbon, "*Decline and Fall*," c. 27.

⁴ Wilcke, "*Geschichte des Tempelherren Ordens*," vol. i. p. 357.

regard to Jesus Christ; all that is certain is, that both borrowed much from ancient Sabæism. The Gnostics who joined the Mandaïtes must have been few in number, for it is a curious fact that Mandaïsm has ever remained in the East, while Gnosticism has ever directed itself towards the West. On the contrary, the march of the Manichæans and the Gnostics was almost the same, and there were great affinities between them; they both disdained the simple doctrines of Judaism and Christianity, and assumed the mission of reforming them; they both rejected part of the sacred writings, and interpreted the rest according to their secret traditions; thus, as the Manichæans continued for eight centuries after Manes, and mingled at different times with Priscillianists and Paulicians, with Bogomiles and Cathari, with Albigenses and perhaps even with Stadinghi; so also the remains of Gnosticism continued in existence until the infancy of the Renaissance⁵.

Manes, the founder of the sect which bears his name, had, before he became a Christian, lived amongst the Magi in Persia. The sources whence he derived his doctrines were no doubt the system of Zoroaster, such as it existed at that time; Christianity, such as he received it; and Gnosticism, such as it was every where to be found in Christian society. He moreover declared himself to be the Paraclete. His celebrated epistle, the *Epistola Fundamenti*, commences with these words, "Manes, Apostle of Jesus Christ, elected by God the Father. These are the words of salvation which have emanated from the eternal living source⁶." Like the Gnostics, Manes wished to purify the doctrines of Christianity, by freeing them from the alterations it was asserted that they had undergone, and by developing them where he thought they required it.

He rejected the Old Testament, and only retained part of

⁵ Matter, "Histoire du Gnosticisme," iii. p. 209.

⁶ Augustinus, "Contra Epist. Fund.," c. 5.

the New. He himself composed a gospel, the "Ersenki-Mani," embellished with allegorical paintings, which he declared to have fallen from Heaven; the drawings resemble those of the Cabalists and Ophites, of which they were probably a mere imitation.

The predominant idea of this system was Pantheism, which indeed is more or less to be traced in all the Schools of *Gnosis*, but this Pantheism was modified by the ancient dualism of Asia¹.

The doctrines as well as the morality of the Manichæans were taught differently to the elect and to the vulgar, for in their fraternity there was a severe probation, and a gradual and difficult ascent from the lower degrees to the chosen ranks of the perfect². The elect, or perfect, were to practise utter abnegation of all that can please the body, which is the prison of the soul, and to hold marriage in contempt. The Catechumens or auditors were allowed greater latitude; but while, on the one hand, they were permitted to enjoy the pleasures of this world, on the other hand, they were never taught the doctrines of Manes but under the veil of allegory and of symbols. The vitality of the Manichæans was wonderful; notwithstanding the severe persecution they endured in Persia and in the heathen as well as the Christian Roman Empire, they survived both in the East and in the West, and often reappeared in the Middle Ages in different parts of Europe. Manichæism dared to do what Gnosticism had never ventured upon; it openly entered the lists against the Church in the fifth century, but the civil authority came to aid the religious authority in repressing it. The Manichæans wherever they appeared were immediately attacked; they were condemned in Spain in the year 380, and at Trèves in 385, in their representatives the Priscillianists; the Empire seemed determined

¹ Matter, t. ii. 208.

² Milman, "History of Latin Christianity," iv. p. 174.

to annihilate Manichæism, as well as Gnosticism, when suddenly the latter arose under a new form and under a new name—that of Paulicianism¹.

The Paulicians are only known to us by the descriptions of their enemies, and they have been accused of incest, of magic, of lying, and of the sacrifice of children in superstitious rites; these are probably mere rumours spread by the hatred of their adversaries rather than realities. They rejected all the institutions and festivals of the Church; they aimed at the restoration of the primitive Church; they called themselves the Citizens of Christ, and affected the life of a community of saints. They considered all the faithful as united by Christianity, and as raised to a sort of mystic fraternity. The Paulicians proposed to themselves "to follow the ray of divine light which had remained in the soul, to seek communion with the Almighty, and to liberate all that was pure and heavenly in man from the dominion of matter." Such were, no doubt, the general principles of their morality, but they professed other principles which can hardly have failed to corrupt their morals. They rejected the laws of the Pentateuch and the Church with regard to the forbidden degrees of marriage, and the accusation that alliances were allowed to be formed between the very closest relations cannot be disproved.

The constant wars to which they were exposed in Armenia and in Thrace cannot but have had an evil effect upon them.

They were ever brave, but like the Gnostics, ever unwilling to suffer martyrdom¹, and by the habit of concealing their doctrines, and of denying them, they contracted that of allowing themselves every sort of falsehood².

¹ Matter, "*Histoire du Gnosticisme*," t. iii. p. 217.

¹ Gibbon, "*Decline and Fall*," c. 54, says, "They were not ambitious of martyrdom."

² See Photius, "*Adv. Paulianistas*," i. c. 8.

Paulicianism did not perish at this period, but, on the contrary, reappeared under other forms and appellations.

In the East, the Euchites of the eleventh century, like the Paulicians, declared that prayer was the fundamental principle of religious life and worship. Some of them were monks belonging to the orthodox Church, and attempted to justify their errors by pretending that they were visions obtained by their prayers; others formed separate societies in Mesopotamia; but the watch which was kept over them in the tenth and eleventh centuries did not allow them fully to organize themselves, and has prevented a better knowledge of their doctrines. Their principles are more clearly announced among the Bogomiles, who established themselves in Thrace in the twelfth century; but perhaps they assumed more settled forms in the sects of Puritans or Cathari, who before the Bogomiles attained a remarkable degree of consistency and organization.

Although there is no positive proof of a direct communication between the Cathari of Italy, of Thrace, of Gaul, of Sicily, and of Spain, with the Paulicians or Euchites of the East, yet such are the analogies between the doctrines of these innumerable sectaries, that one must suppose very intimate relations between them³.

In addition to the many names given to these heretics, the general appellation of Manichæans was uniformly used.

The doctrines of the Cathari of the eleventh century evidently connect them with the Paulicians or Euchites of the ninth and tenth centuries, just as the doctrines of those of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries connect them with the Eastern Bogomiles of the same period⁴.

The Cathari of these two centuries pretended to peculiar

³ Muratori, "*Antiquitates Medii Ævi*," t. v. p. 83. Mosheim, "*Instit. Hist. Eccles.*," p. 463. Gibbon, "*Decline and Fall*," c. 54.

⁴ Matter, "*Histoire du Gnosticisme*," iii. 257.

revelations; they rejected the Old Testament, and especially the Prophets; they denied the efficacy of Baptism, and of the Lord's Supper; they affected secret doctrines, a sort of initiation, fasting, chastity, and a contemplative life; they pretended that they enjoyed profound knowledge, angelic visions, and perfect purity. Like the Basilidians, they promised to their adepts the power of transporting themselves in a moment wherever they wished; and like all Gnostics, disbelieved the reality of the birth, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Instead of the baptism by water, which they rejected, as a ceremony instituted by a "secondary prophet, St. John," they adopted a baptism of fire or of spirit. They also celebrated a sort of spiritual supper; and they attributed the greatest influence to these two ceremonies, inasmuch as they purified men from sin, filled them with the Holy Spirit, and initiated them into the meaning of the holy mysteries³. It is very difficult to obtain precise indications of the characteristic doctrines of such sectaries. It is evident that in the presence of their judges they avoided as much as possible all that could inculcate them; and on the other hand, it is tolerably clear that the popular charges against them are full of gross exaggeration.

Throughout the whole of the eleventh century these "Manichæans" of France and Flanders, as well as those of Italy, kept themselves concealed; and their doctrines form an almost incomprehensible mixture of mysticism and of hostility to the Church, its clergy and its sacraments. In the labyrinth of their aberrations it is strange to find how they clung to the idea, that a life of expiation was the most certain way of restoring their souls to original purity and happiness; they ascribed no merit to martyrdom suffered for the cause of religion, and they therefore avoided it, but they voluntarily

³ D'Achery "Spicilegium," t. i. p. 604.

endured the most severe privations or penances, even so far as to kill themselves by slow poison, or by starvation.

What is still more curious is, that abstinence and asceticism was so common amongst them as to give their complexion an extraordinary pallor; and this was so recognized a mark of these sectaries that some orthodox Catholics found their accidental paleness fatal to them⁶.

In the twelfth century the new Manichæans had become stronger in number, and more clearly marked; they gave themselves more openly the name of Cathari or Puritans, which recalls that of Elect in use among older sects.

But the people and the Church, irritated against them, gave them different appellations in every country; the name Cathari was often modified into that of Cazari, and in Germany this word was changed into that of Ketzer, which has ever afterwards served to designate heretics; in Italy they were called Patarini, Patelini, Publicani; in France and in England many other similar names were given them. The "*Vita Hereticorum*" of Bonacursus⁷, who had been one of the teachers of the Milanese Cathari, written about the year 1190, is a most valuable work, for the light it casts on the secret principles and doctrines of the different sects. He declares that some said with the Church that the Almighty was the author of Creation, others that it was the work of Satan, but that in reality all believed that it was Satan. This was the system they had borrowed from the Gnostics: going beyond the demiourgos and his angels, they had gone direct to Ophiomorphos

⁶ See Martin et Durand "*Collectio Amplissima*," t. iv. c. 50, "*Eos (Francigenos) solo pallore notare hæreticos quasi quos pallere constaret hæreticos esse certum esset; sicque per errorem simulque furem eorum plerosque vere Catholicorum fuisse aliquando interemptos.*"

Martin, in his "*Histoire de France*," t. iii. p. 88, says that "in the year 1052, the Emperor, Henry III., discovered some Manichæans by their refusal to eat a chicken which had been cooked for them by order of the bishops, and that they were all executed."

⁷ See D'Achery, t. i. p. 208.

and his angels. They interpreted allegorically the whole history of the fall of Adam. Like most of the Gnostics, the Cathari attributed to Satan the creation and government of the visible world and of the human race, and they did not give to Christ the Son an equal rank with the Father Almighty.

Bonacursus shows that it is less the remains of Manichæism than of Gnosticism which we behold in this sect; according to the former, Jesus Christ is confounded with Mithras and the sun; according to the latter, the seven planetary geniuses, of which Ialdabaoth is the chief, have the principal part in the government of the world and of mankind; according to the Cathari, the Devil is the genius of the sun, Eve is that of the moon, and all the stars are demons⁸. It is remarkable that Bonacursus, who had become the adversary of the fraternity to which he had belonged, accuses it of no immorality; all that can be discovered from the judicial inquiries on the Cathari is, that they were noted for their asceticism.

All these sectaries, although generally termed Manichæans, had little in common with that great sect; yet those of Trèves and of Cologne (1146) seem really to approach Manichæism by their principles of abstinence and continence, and by their division into auditors, believers, and elect. These Cathari were designated in France as "Tisserands⁹," in Flanders as "Piphles;" they celebrated the Bema, one of the principal feasts of Manichæism.

In their institutions the Albigenses resembled the Paulicians and the Gnostics; they rejected the sacraments, and divided themselves into the perfect, the good, and the believers.

According to their adversaries these Cathari rejected marriage, and limited the dominion of sin over the body, saying

⁸ See Moneta, "Adv. Catharos," p. 113, "Ipsum diabolum credunt esse solem, lunam dicunt esse Hevam—omnes stellas credunt esse dæmones."

⁹ The mystical Beghards assumed this name. See Michelet, "Hist. de France," ii. p. 405.

that "nullus poterat peccare ab umbilico et inferius." They are said to have believed in two creators, one invisible and good, the other visible and evil: they attributed the New Testament to the good creator, the Old Testament to the evil one. Others said there was but one Creator, but that he had had two sons, Christ and the Devil¹.

Wild and absurd as their doctrines were, yet they clung to them with great attachment, and in the south of France even succeeded in gaining powerful protectors.

The contest they had with the Church is well known. Innocent III. gave the signal for their persecution, and rewarded its authors; his legates and his missionaries continually inflamed the hatred of the murderers; the founders of the Inquisition, the Bishop of Ozma and St. Dominic, introduced a system of spies throughout the country; Germans came even from the extremities of Austria at the call of their monks to take part in the work of extermination, and even Matthew Paris bears witness to the joy of his countrymen "at the miracle which had avenged the Lord at Beziers²." Gibbon says, "Innocent III. surpassed the sanguinary fame of Theodora," and that "the cruelty of her priests was far excelled by the founders of the Inquisition, an office more adapted to confirm than to refute the belief of an evil principle." Yet notwithstanding the long and cruel wars which had been waged against the Cathari from the beginning of the twelfth century, they still continued in the thirteenth century, when they are to be found in France, under the names of Albigenes and Popilicani; in Lombardy, under those of Gazari and Patarini, Patelini, Luciferi, Publicani; in Germany, under those of Kathari, Kataristæ, and Burgari³.

¹ See Duchesne, "*Scriptores Hist. Franc.*," t. v. p. 554.

² Sismondi, "*Histoire de France*," t. vi. p. 370.

³ Benoit d'Argentré, "*Histoire des Albigeois et Vaudois*," p. 90. See also Pezii "*Scriptores Rerum Austriac.*," t. ii. p. 534.

They were spread over Italy, Spain, the South of France, and Germany, down to the confines of Bulgaria; in Austria they were still very numerous at the commencement of the fourteenth century.

Irreligion, heresy, and shameless debaucheries have been unhesitatingly imputed to the Albigenses by the bitter hostility of their enemies, and have been as zealously denied by their apologists. Perhaps these accusations are not without some foundation if by the term Albigenses are meant the people of Languedoc and of Provence; for there, with luxury and civilization, had come much freedom of thought and laxity of morals; but if the appellation of Albigenses be made to include the Waldenses, or followers of Peter Waldo, then the accusation of dissoluteness of manners may be entirely rejected, and the charge of heresy regarded as malignant and exaggerated. If, on the one hand, we may believe that some few of the Albigenses aimed at the destruction of the whole system of revealed religion, yet, on the other hand, they will be found in general only to have anticipated and held the same doctrines which, after the lapse of three centuries, were to be publicly proclaimed by the reformers of Germany and England.

The merciless war which destroyed the Albigensian heresy, destroyed with it those provinces which had given the signal of the Renaissance to Western civilization, those cities where liberty had made the greatest progress, that rich literature, and that society in which citizens and nobles had mingled on terms of equality in the Courts of Love and in the lists of Chivalry.

According to Matthew Paris, the Cathari had as ruler a Pope dwelling on the borders of Bulgaria, Croatia, and Dalmatia, and also a kind of Vice-Pope dwelling near Toulouse, but he is not supported by other authorities. It is certain that, finding themselves so numerous, they attempted to form

one single great association, and that they did not succeed in their attempt⁴.

The Albigenes, if they were Manichæans, as is probable, would naturally have preserved with the doctrines the signs and symbols for mutual recognition so much in use among the followers of Gnosis, and such devices would become a matter of absolute necessity, when by persecution congregations of men were forced to become secret fraternities⁵.

The Vaudois must not be confounded with the Albigenes; they are a Western sect. The Albigenes, or the Cathari of Italy, of Croatia, of Dalmatia, and Bulgaria, are an Eastern sect; every thing in the history of the latter shows us this, and especially the history of the Bogomiles.

The severe measures of the Court of Constantinople had not allowed the new Paulicians, the Euchites and the Enthusiasts of the tenth and twelfth centuries to become organized or to develop themselves: on the contrary, extraordinary efforts were made to extirpate them. Just as the Emperor Alexis thought he had succeeded in this, a new sect, the Bogomiles, came to take the place of the Euchites and Enthusiasts. The Bogomiles had secretly made as much progress in the East as the Cathari in the West.

The chief of this fraternity was Basil, a fanatical theosophist, who believed himself to be under divine protection. The Basilidians had taught that they could become invisible and impenetrable. Basil, when condemned to the flames, declared that he would come out of the fire unscathed. The Bogomiles may perhaps be considered as having indirectly descended from the Messalians of the fourth century, through the intermediary

⁴ Matter, "*Hist. du Gnosticisme*," t. iii. p. 287.

⁵ See King's "*Gnostics and their Remains*," p. 177; and the Abbé Barruel, "*Mémoires du Jacobinisme*," t. ii. 390, who quotes:—

"*Manichæorum alter alteri obviam factus dexteras dant sibi ipsis signi causâ*" (ex Epiphano).

"*Signa oris, manuum, et sinûs*" (ex August.).

sects of the Paulicians and Euchites. Their theology rested principally on a Gnostic basis; they held that the visible world is governed by a secondary divinity, independently and contrary to the laws of the supreme Deity⁶. Their institutions corresponded to their principles—they preached a spiritual worship, they rejected all external emblems, especially images of gold and silver, which they called the idols of the heathens.

Yet they represented God the Father in the likeness of an old man with a long beard, the Son in that of a man with a young beard, the Holy Ghost in the likeness of a smooth-faced youth⁷.

They did not venerate the cross, because, as they asserted, it had been employed in the death of Christ; but it is evident that this was not their real motive, for they neither believed in the death nor in the actual sufferings of the Redeemer. They considered the baptism by water as instituted by St. John, and imperfect; they therefore rebaptized their proselytes with the spirit, a baptism which they said was instituted by Christ. The neophyte had a time assigned to him for confession, purification (*ἀγνεία*), and fervent prayer; the Gospel of St. John was then placed on his head, and the Holy Spirit called down upon him.

After this baptism, another space of time was assigned to him for a more complete initiation (*ἀγωγή*) and for a purer conduct. If he fulfilled all the requirements he was placed with his face towards the East, again the Gospel of St. John was put on his head, and he received the initiation he desired. This ceremony seems to have been the principal religious rite of the Bogomiles. They affected great austerity and asceticism, they prayed much, but the only prayer that they thought really efficacious was the Lord's Prayer; those who aspired to perfection kept a very strict and pure course of life—they abstained from meat, cheese, and eggs, and did not marry. These

⁶ The doctrines of the Bogomiles are given at length in Matter's "Histoire du Gnosticisme," t. iii. pp. 298—304.

⁷ See Euthymius Zigabenus, § 11.

were considered worthy to receive the Holy Spirit. Those in whom the Holy Spirit resided were said to be *θεοτόκοι*, fit to conceive the word of God; they pretended that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, appeared to them in frequent visions, and they were said never to die, but in their sleep to shake off without pain the carnal prison of their soul, and to put on the divine form of Christ, taking the same body and the same shape as His. The Bogomiles considered themselves as the only mortals who were free from the power of the demons that dwelt, as they asserted, in all other men, urging them to evil and to impiety; and like the Paulicians they called themselves "*Christopolitæ*." Enough has been said to show that the doctrines of the vast sect of the Gnostics are still to be found, as far as their principles go, in those of the Bogomiles, and traces of them may perhaps be perceived throughout the Middle Ages.

IV.

It is remarkable that as Gnosticism sprang up in opposition to Christianity, so, even in the most flourishing days of Mohammedanism, the Sufis, whose name was probably derived from the Greek, and was considered as equivalent to that of Gnostics, or learned in things divine, taught a kind of mystic Pantheism, and inculcated the idea of one universal creed, which could be secretly held under any profession of outward faith. The doctrine of viewing God in all, and all in God, may produce, like fatalism, piety or its very opposite among its followers; the distinctions between vice and virtue become less marked, and even atrocious crimes are regarded only as the means to a good end. The Ismailites, or Assassins, who first became known to the Europeans during the Crusades, seem to have carried such a doctrine to its very worst consequences. There is scarcely a more singular circumstance in history than the rise of this secret fraternity, which, for three centuries, was

the terror of the Caliphate, in the destruction of which it was at length itself also overthrown.

The origin of its foundation is to be traced to Egypt, and it is a curious fact, that that country, so famous in ancient times for its mysteries, occupies also an important place in the history of the secret fraternities of the Middle Ages, but with this striking difference, that while the former were intended to strengthen the throne and the altar, the latter were founded for the purpose of ruining and overthrowing them.

The new religion which Mohammed had given to the Arabs united in one person the dignity of pontiff and of sovereign. This union of the spiritual with the temporal power could not fail to produce violent contests, which commenced at the death of the Prophet; for as Christendom could obey but one Pope, so the Moslem world could recognize but one Caliph. But as three Popes have pretended to the triple crown, so also three Caliphs have laid claim to supreme power. Thus, in almost all the Eastern sects which arose at this period, the chief ground of the schism was the contested succession to the throne.

The origin of all these, which may be included under the general term of Ismailites, must be referred to the division of Moslems into two great sects, the Soonnis and the Shiites. The former upheld the legitimacy of the three first successors of Mohammed, the latter maintained the indefeasible right of his cousin and son-in-law Ali and of his descendants, called Fatimites or Ismailites. All the rebellions which have agitated the Empire of the Caliphs seem to have arisen from the union of the claims of Ali with the philosophical doctrines current in Persia. In that country, under the Sassanides, new opinions and reforms had sprung up, and several mysterious associations had been formed, which to the theology of Zoroaster had added doctrines chiefly borrowed from Gnosticism. Oriental historians have enumerated seven such societies

in the middle of the seventh century. These, when the Arabs conquered Persia, laboured to instil their doctrines into the minds of their conquerors, and thus to undermine Islamism.

Their efforts were successful, and the different sects of the Rawendi, the Mohammed, and the Sefidjamegan, propagated the hatred of Islamism throughout the Moslem population. But it was not until the ninth century that a secret order was formed, as it is asserted, for the very purpose of overturning the Empire of the Caliphs.

Abdallah, the son of Maimun-Koddah, had perceived the danger of declaring open war against the established religion and reigning dynasty; he therefore resolved to found a society in which the teaching of the revolutionary doctrines should be divided into seven degrees. In the last degree only, the vanity of all religion and the indifference of all human actions was inculcated.

The first fruits of the conspiracy was the rise of the Karmathians, who however disregarded the prudent maxims of Abdallah, and were, after a sanguinary contest, almost entirely exterminated by the united armies of the princes of Irak and Syria. The operations of the secret societies were nevertheless continued, though more warily and covertly, until Dai Abdollah, one of their most zealous partisans, took refuge in Egypt, and, at the head of a numerous body of devoted followers, founded the Fatimite^a or Ismaili dynasty, to the ruin of the Abbassides and of the Koran.

Under this dynasty, Egypt seems to have revived her ancient mysteries; the secret associations which had raised it to the throne now held regular meetings in Cairo under the fostering protection of the Caliphs, who erected for them a splendid edifice, called *Dar-al-hikmet* or "House of Wisdom." This lodge of Cairo became a vast and gloomy arsenal of

^a The Fatimite Caliphate was overthrown, A.D. 1171, by Salaheddin.

fanaticism and science, of religion and atheism. Implicit obedience to their superiors was required of all who became its members, who were then led by successive stages from religion to mysticism, from mysticism to philosophy, and from doubt to absolute indifference⁹. These associations lasted till the fall of the Fatimite Empire, and during this period their emissaries penetrated into every part of Asia, even into the palace at Bagdad. But it was not until restored to the mountains of Persia, whose early sectaries had given birth to this association, that it bore its full fruit. It was here that its doctrines, assimilating themselves to the spirit of resistance of the intrepid mountaineers, taught them that heroism of assassination which excited the wonder and abhorrence of later ages.

A Persian adventurer, named Hassan-ben-Sabah, whose ambitious views had been thwarted at the Seljukian court, fled to Egypt, where he became deeply imbued with the secret doctrines, and was admitted into the highest class of the initiated. On his return to Persia he determined to establish a similar association. The rock of Alamut (the Vulture's nest), in Kuhistan, afforded him an impregnable central point for the foundation of his power, to which the Ismailites of every part of Syria and Persia soon hastened.

The Ismailites in Africa, during the two hundred years that they had existed under the Fatimite rule, had indeed shaken the thrones of the Abbassides, but had not succeeded in overturning them. Hassan perceived the cause of their failure: he felt that hands as well as heads were requisite to carry out the purposes of the society, and added to the two classes of Daïs and Refiks, or Masters and Fellows, already existing in the society, a third class of faithful and active men, who were to be the mere blind and fanatical instruments of their superiors.

⁹ Hammer, "*Geschichte der Assassinen*," p. 44, says, "*Der letzte Grad lehrte die Eitelkeit aller Religionen, und die Gleichgültigkeit aller Handlungen.*"

To these the significant name of "Fedavie," devoted, was given.

Thus arose the Eastern branch of Ismailis mentioned by Oriental writers under the name of Mulahid, or impious, and by Europeans under that of Assassins. This appellation, the origin of which has been the subject of much dispute, is probably to be derived from the "hashish," an intoxicating preparation of hemp¹, given to the Fedavies on the eve of some dangerous enterprise, and may at first have applied only to those who were especially educated to commit murder in obedience to the will of their chief, but was afterwards used to designate the Ismailites collectively.

It is also worthy of remark that such intoxicating preparations were not at this period known in Moslem countries, and had probably been derived by the Assassins from India, as a precious secret, and as a mainspring of their power, just as the Thugs carefully preserved the secret of their sacred sugar.

History affords no parallel to the absolute command acquired by the chief of the Assassins over the minds of his devoted adherents. The allurements of sensual pleasure, and the terrors of superstition were alike employed to rivet their allegiance.

Travellers and historians have given wonderful accounts of beautiful gardens, true Eastern paradises, where fragrant perfumes, exquisite wines, delightful harmony, and lovely women, all conspired to charm the neophytes, who had been secretly transported into them while under the influence of a soporific draught. When they had sufficiently enjoyed the delights prepared for them, they were removed as secretly as they had been introduced, and on awaking found themselves by the side of their superior, who endeavoured to persuade them that they had never actually left his presence, but had

¹ See Silvestre de Sacy, "*Mémoire sur les Assassins.*"

been spiritually conveyed into Paradise, and had enjoyed a foretaste of the ineffable blessings reserved for the faithful².

The order, or fraternity of the Assassins, spread over all the country from the frontiers of Khorassan to the mountains of Syria, from the Musdoramus to Lebanon, and from the Caspian to the Mediterranean. By European writers³ they are designated as a religious order under an abbot who is called the Old Man, and who is said to have had at the time of the Crusades more than forty thousand adherents. Every where they seized upon the castles and strong places, in order to strengthen their power. A reign of terror was established in Asia, which became the scene of fearful murders, and as terrible reprisals.

The Fedavies were clothed in white, and were termed *Mobeyese*, the white, or *Mohammere*, the red, because they wore red turbans, boots, and girdles. "Thus habited in the hues of innocence and blood, and of pure devotion and murder, and armed with daggers, they formed the guard of the grand master, the executioners of his deadly orders, the sanguinary tools of the ambition and revenge of the order of Assassins."

In the East, human life has never been held at the same value as in Europe, and the dagger and poison have been freely employed to satisfy the desires of ambition and of vengeance.

The higher classes of the Ismailites alone were initiated into the secrets of the order; the Fedavies were never admitted to the mysteries of irreligion and immorality, but were bound to fulfil the strictest duties of Islamism, with the additional work of assassination; it was by their blind obedience that they hoped to obtain the favour of the invisible Iman (whom they had learned to respect), and some day to receive the reward of

² Marco Polo, "De Regionibus Orient.," i. p. 28. "Mines de l'Orient," iii. p. 201.

³ "Gesta Dei per Francos," p. 994. Jacobus de Vitriaco, "Hist. Hierosolym.," p. 1062.

⁴ Hammer, "Geschichte der Assassinen," p. 56.

their devotedness. The dagger, not the sword, was their weapon. Armed with this they attacked Sultan, King, or Caliph, and followed each other in their deadly purpose, neither daunted nor discouraged, as one after another they were struck down. In attempting the life of the Emir Kara Sonkor, as many as one hundred and twenty-four assassins successively perished; many other instances of their self-sacrificing devotion are related by Oriental and Western writers⁵.

The influence of this secret order became immense; the Assassins were every where to be found, appearing in different disguises, as physicians, monks, goldsmiths, and merchants, so that it was impossible for their victims to escape. Princes, who were summoned by the fraternity to deliver up fortresses, dared not yield them for fear of their subjects, nor keep them for fear of being murdered, and so demolished them. There was no safety for them, though they might be surrounded by their guards and in the very midst of their palaces, for each might at any moment expect to see a murderer spring forth from among his most faithful servants.

The Sultan Sandjar, who had sent troops against the Ismailites, was struck with terror one morning, when on awaking he found a dagger in the ground close to his head. A few days afterwards he received a brief note from Alamut with these words, "Had we not been well affected towards the Sultan, the dagger would have been struck into his heart, and not into the ground." Unable to cope with so dangerous and mysterious a foe, the Sultan, who was the most powerful monarch of the East, hastened to make peace. Thus in the midst of the weak and corrupt governments of the Mohammedan world, there was but one strong and living power, this horrible heroism of the Assassins, a fearful association firmly

⁵ Elmacin, "*Hist. Saracenica*," iii. p. 286. Marinus Sanutus, *Lib. iii. p. x. c. 8.*

planted in the Persian rock, in face of the Caliphate, like the dagger close to the Sultan's head.

It must, however, be remembered that when this fraternity was expelled and destroyed, their library at Alamut, with all the philosophical and sceptical works written in conformity with the Ismailite doctrine, was committed to the flames, and thus the only accounts which have reached us are given by their conquerors, who may have exaggerated their crimes, and may have wished to aggravate their infamy.

It is curious to find that writers who have attempted to clear the Assassins from the charges brought against them, as well as those who have regarded them with the bitterest hostility, have equally traced to their order the origin of Freemasons⁶.

Their sanguinary deeds might have been attributed to accident, or to mere hereditary feuds, rather than to a regular system of infidelity and homicide, had not one of their grand masters, Hassan II., A.D. 1163, thrown off the mask and published to the profane the secret doctrines, hitherto the inheritance of the initiated only.

From the time of this loosening of the law, the people were emancipated from all legal obligations. Hassan himself was the first martyr to the new doctrine he had preached, and the history of the Assassins shows that henceforth the murders within the order itself were more atrocious, though less frequent, than those of its enemies. The grandmasters successively fell by the hands of their nearest relations, unable to turn from themselves the daggers they had so often directed against their foes. Parricide had avenged parricide, murder had followed murder; the time was come, when, after an existence of a hundred and twenty years, the Assassins were to suffer the annihilation of their society. It is difficult to

⁶ Higgins, "Anacalypsis," ii. p. 388. Hammer, "Geschichte der Assassinen," passim. He says of the Assassins, "Diese waren gleichsam Freimaurer."

conceive how a fraternity of such a nature could have existed for so long a period, did we not know the influence of fanaticism and religious zeal.

The proceedings of such an association cannot be defended, either with regard to the contemporary events, or with regard to the ulterior objects at which it aimed.

A century before, the Ismailites had inundated the whole of Asia; now their daggers were powerless against the myriads of Mogul barbarians who, under the command of Holagou Khan⁷, almost extirpated the sectaries of Alamut. The conquerors ruthlessly pursued their victims; whenever they saw an Assassin they said to him, "Kneel," and so cut off his head.

Two years before, the same general had overthrown the Abbasside Caliphate of Bagdad, and thus crushed in one common ruin the two parties, which during five centuries had contended for the visionary right to the Imamate.

In Syria, where distance preserved them from the swords of the Moguls, the Assassins survived fourteen years more, paying a tribute to the Knights of St. John for protection, until they were reduced to vassalage by the Sultan Bibars. In Persia, they rose again seventy years after their first dispersion, but were finally extirpated by Timur, A.D. 1392; and no vestige remained of these "enemies of mankind" except the word assassin, which in the most odious sense has been adopted into the languages of Europe. They continued, however, both in Persia and in Syria, as religious sectaries without any political influence, and even to this day the old haunts of the Assassins are occupied by various sects who seem animated by the same spirit of religious fanaticism and licentiousness. The villages round Massiat are peopled by Ismailites, Mossairis, Motewelis, and Druses⁸.

⁷ Gibbon, "Decline and Fall," c. 64.

⁸ Wilken, "Geschichte der Kreuzzüge," vii. p. 405.

⁹ See Niebuhr, "Voyages," ii. p. 234. Hammer, p. 332, says that the Druses "den Teufel in besonderen Ehren halten."

The latter are more ancient than the Assassins, as they derived their origin from the old lodge of Cairo, and are the most important of the modern sects. They regard Hakem, the third of the Fatimite Caliphs of Egypt, and one of the maddest of tyrants, as the incarnation of divinity; but conform outwardly to the Mohammedan religion, and their secret societies seem to be confined to a small number of priests called "Okkals" or initiated, who envelop them in mystery.

All these sects are said to have secret meetings held at night, which, if we are to believe orthodox Mussulmen, are the scenes of the most licentious debauchery¹; they are also supposed to worship a calf, but very little is known of their tenets.

The Assassins might have been regarded as an unique instance in history of a fraternity of systematic murderers, were it not that in modern times, the existence in India of a vast association of a similar nature has been detected, the members of which are even more extraordinary in their principles and acts than the disciples of the Old Man of the Mountain.

Strange and appalling glimpses of this phenomenon had been obtained, but the horrible reality had never been proved.

The gangs of Thugs², or Phansigars, who strangled travellers in India have been discovered to be merely portions of a vast organized community, the members of which recognized each other as brethren throughout the country, and the existence of which has escaped the notice of British, as well as of native, governments.

The origin of Thuggee is lost in the remotest antiquity, but the resemblances between the Thugs and the Assassins are very striking, and if the similarities between ancient Egypt

¹ The Turks call these sects "Musindiren" (extinguishers), from their extinguishing the lights at their meetings. Hammer, "*Geschichte der Assassinen*," compares them to the Bacchanalia at Rome. See King, "*Gnostics and their Remains*," p. 19.

² See Sleeman's "*Thug Depredations in India*."

and India are remembered, it will not be thought improbable that these secret fraternities are closely connected.

The murders are all committed by the Thugs according to ancient and solemn forms which have been handed down from generation to generation, and are regarded as religious rites which must be observed, and in which the murdered person is the victim offered up to their goddess.

They consider their calling holy, and honourable, and look upon the plunder as gain sanctified by religion. The sacred sugar of the Thugs corresponds in some degree to the "*hashish*" of the Assassins; they pretend that a man who has once tasted it, will at once become a Thug, though he should have all the wealth in the world.

It is said, that all the operations of their trade are to be seen represented in the caves of Ellora.

The existence of Ismailis in India under the name of Borahs, who maintained that part of the Creed of Hassan-Sabah which enjoins a complete devotion to the mandate of their high priest, was known before the existence of the Thugs as an organized society had been detected³. It is remarkable that the appellation "*Borah*" is used as synonymous with Thug in the Ramasee, or cant of the Thugs; and the evidence of facts, as well as the traditions current among themselves, seem to point to an Ismaili origin. The date assigned by them to their first establishment, appears to coincide exactly with the destruction of the Assassins at Alamut; and it is not improbable that some of the fugitives who fled from the exterminating swords of the Moguls, made their way into India.

Perhaps the original Moslem Thugs may have been formed out of some of the most degraded of the Ismailis, who, after the "*loosening of the law*," did not scruple to unite with Hindoo Thugs already existing.

It may easily be imagined, that those who believed in the

³ Sir John Malcolm, "*History of Persia*," c. 9.

indifference of all actions, and the vanity of all religion, would readily join a fraternity whose practice was so akin to their own, and would not hesitate to change the dagger for the handkerchief, or to adopt any superstitious ceremonies which might be necessary to form a bond of union.

Burckhardt⁴ shows that a correspondence is still maintained between the Ismailis of Syria and those of India; and this discovery is valuable, as proving that the organization set on foot a thousand years ago by Abdallah, and afterwards modified by Hassan-Sabah, had not yet been entirely dissolved. This may go far to show the vitality of such fraternities, and the influence which they exercise upon those which follow them.

V.

In the proceedings of the "Vehmgerichte," or Secret Tribunals of Westphalia, are to be found traces of retribution fulfilled as swiftly and as certainly as were the sentences of the Assassin Lord of the Mountain. Germany has ever been fertile in secret fraternities. Liberty has found in that land her most enthusiastic defenders; yet, strange to say, the frequent contests which have arisen from this circumstance, have been but of little advantage to the peoples of that country.

Perhaps this may be the result of a general national characteristic, a tendency to introspective contemplation, rather than to action, to romantic conception of abstract right, rather than to practical development of the idea of freedom.

Germany seems ever faithful to the traditions of the past, neglectful of the present, yet full of dreams for the future. To this permanent disposition of the German mind may be attributed the existence of the numerous secret fraternities which have been formed in that country.

Even the arts, literature, and poetry of Germany are more or less the expression of that deep love of mysticism which seems

⁴ Burckhardt, "Travels in Arabia," i. p. 216.

all-pervading. The Secret Tribunals of Westphalia, the Rosicrucians, the *Illuminati*, have been living instances of this powerful feeling.

The proceedings of the Vehmgerichte⁵ have so often formed the subject of poetry and romance, that the most erroneous views with respect to them have become prevalent; and it is difficult to eradicate the very general impression of horror and aversion which has taken so firm a hold of the popular imagination.

We read of nothing but of secret nocturnal meetings in subterranean caverns, of cruel tortures, and of foul murders, all of which can be disproved.

Huber, in his tragedy, "The Secret Tribunal," describes a terrible and secret brotherhood, the members of which met with solemn and mystic ceremonies at midnight in gloomy mountain caverns; and whose object was to acquire all knowledge, to attain to infallibility, and to anticipate the decrees of Providence.

Goethe has thus described the condition of Germany while these tribunals flourished:—"All strength without the State was paralyzed, all order within it was destroyed; besides, the Vehmgericht pressed as a heavy weight over a great part of our Fatherland, the terrors of which institution can be imagined when we remember that it soon degenerated into a secret police, which at length fell entirely into the hands of private persons."

Those who are struck with awe at the very name of "secret" tribunals, should bear in mind that, throughout the Middle Ages, Law was never such a secret to the people as when, later on, as statutes were piled on statutes, it became a long, dreary, and formidable puzzle.

⁵ The word "Vehme" has received so many different interpretations that it is difficult to form a decided opinion as to its origin. All that can be said on the subject is to be found in Grimm's "Rechtsalterthümer," p. 681. 829, and his latest views in his "Deutsches Wörterbuch," s. v. *Feme*.

The views of historians as to the origin of the Vehmgerichte have varied greatly; but the general opinion of the Middle Ages was that they had been established by Charlemagne. The Free Counts and Schöffen of these secret tribunals clung to this tradition, and in the imperial records it is mentioned as an undoubted fact⁶.

It was believed that Charlemagne had instituted such a jurisdiction for the purpose of coercing the Saxons to Christianity in accordance with the advice of the Pope⁷. The tradition was that Charlemagne, finding himself unable to prevent by force of arms the relapse of the Saxons from Christianity, sent ambassadors to Rome to consult Pope Leo III. The Pope received them in a garden, and while he listened to them without saying a word, pulled up weeds and thistles from the ground, laid them on a miniature gallows which he made out of some boughs, and then dismissed the ambassadors without further ceremony. The latter described what they had seen to the Emperor, who immediately established the secret tribunals at the Imperial Diet of Paderborn. This seems to be mere fiction.

Such an institution would have been as contrary to the spirit of the times, as it is to that of the Carlovingian laws.

The truth seems to be that historians have erred in attempting to discover a special institution of the "Vehmgerichte" as distinct tribunals, for they merely grew out of the old customary law, and should be regarded as the original jurisdiction of the Old Saxons, which survived the subjugation of their country. The Free Judges might well have said with the author of "The Mirror of Saxony,"

⁶ In Kindlinger's "Münstersche Beiträge," iii. p. 217. "Na insate Kayser Karl des groten mylder gedacht." In the Emperor Sigismund's "Reformation," A.D. 1439, we read, "Wie denn solches der grosze und heilige Kaiser Karl gesetzt und verordnet hat." See Müller, "Reichstagstheater," p. 121.

⁷ Freherus, "De Secretis Judiciis," p. 1.

“Dies Recht hab’ ich nicht erdacht,
Es habens von Alters auf uns bracht
Unsere gute Vorfahren ⁸.”

The mystic forms of initiation, the signs and symbols used by them, have been ascribed by Sir Francis Palgrave to the period when the whole system was united to the worship of the deities of vengeance.

The Westphalian Tribunals are in reality nothing more than the Free Courts, or “Grafengerichte,” which continued in existence throughout the political storms of the period under the Free Count, in his position of Imperial Judge. The date of the actual change of the Freigerichte into Vehmgerichte can only be conjectured.

While the Secret Tribunals flourished, death was the penalty for any one who attempted to pry into its mysteries, or who ventured to look into the book which belonged to the Free Schöffen of the Holy Roman Empire, and which contained the laws and ordinances of the fraternity. The feeling of honour, or the fear of death, was so strong among the initiated, that although their number sometimes exceeded one hundred thousand, not one of them ever betrayed his trust.

The first document in which there is an express mention of these Westphalian Tribunals is dated A.D. 1267; it is an instrument by which Engelbert, Count of the Mark, frees one of his tenants from his feudal obligations, “actum in loco judiciali qui dicitur Berle, præsententi iudicio Bernardo de Hencdorp, præsentibus *Vehmenotis*⁹,” (at a place called Berle, when Bernard de Hencdorp presided over the trial, the *Vehmenoti* being present.) Now as the word *Vehmenoti* is

⁸ See Wigand, “Das Femgericht Westphalens,” p. 294. The expressions, “Juxta morem patriæ . . . cum solemnitatibus debitis et consuetis,” “Prout consuetudo exigit,” are constantly met with in the old records.

The ordinances of the Vehmgericht only speak according to old custom, “*na ghesetten und herkomen*.” See Goldast. p. 163.

⁹ See Berck, “Geschichte der Westphälischen Femgerichte,” p. 258.

In Kindlinger’s “Münstersche Beiträge,” iii. 1, No. 94, we find, A.D. 1291, “*præsentibus vehmenotis et consentientibus*.”

synonymous with the *Wissende*, or initiated of the secret fraternity, this is a clear proof of its existence about the middle of the thirteenth century.

Several other documents of the same period are also evidence of their having flourished at this time. But it should be remembered, while we investigate the rise and constitution of these tribunals, that such institutions are only gradually formed and developed. In Westphalia the old judicial institutions were never actually abolished, but were continued without interruption, and were only formed into a new or altered shape by various slight modifications and by the requirements of the times. The origin of the Secret Tribunals can be traced with tolerable certainty, but much remains that is obscure and enigmatical, which, as Wigand says in his work on the "Westphälisches Femgericht," can only be understood by boldly opening the Old Law Books, on which was written, "Diesz Buch sol Niemandt ofthun, lesen, oder horen lesen, dann die echten rechten Freyscheffen der heimlichen beschlossen Acht des heiligen Reychs¹."

It is, however, certain that the Vehmgerichte are much less concealed from our view than has been generally supposed.

They were never actually founded as a distinct tribunal, and were certainly not introduced into Westphalia by its conquerors; but were gradually formed and established through custom and many different circumstances.

Charlemagne sent his *missi dominici* into Saxony as well as into his other dominions, but he allowed the Saxons to retain their old rights and customs. He, however, made several important changes in them, so that the tradition of the establishment of these courts by the Emperor himself may have some truth in it; at any rate it has passed unsifted into the

¹ "This book shall no one open, read, or hear read, except the true free schöffen of the secret closed Tribunal of the Holy Empire." See Berck, p. 167.

² "Karl der Grosze liesz auch der Sachsen meist ihre alten Rechte," Wigand, p. 195. See also Eginhart, "Vita Caroli Magni," ap. Duchesne, p. 103.

public records, and has been preserved in the mouths of the people. No doubt the particular circumstance which, after the death of Charlemagne, confirmed the duration, power, and solidity of these tribunals, was the introduction, by that Emperor, of the *Scabini*, or *Schöffen*, into Saxony with peculiar duties and privileges³.

The early times of German law have been called those of *Faust-recht*, or fist-right, for force had then all the validity of law.

Knights and barons in their fortified castles and their strong towers mocked at the sentences of justice, sometimes paying little attention even to the Emperor's commands. Amid the disorders of the period, thousands perished annually; the citizens within the walls of their cities lived in comparative security, but the sufferings of the peasants were dreadful. It would be erroneous to suppose that the law had absolutely no effect, and that there were no regular tribunals, but their operation was most imperfect.

All justice emanated directly from the people, and rested in the mighty union of all the freemen. The Count, who was elected by the Emperor, had all the Sovereign's rights delegated to him: he led the free proprietors into the field, he collected the revenues, and administered justice. Under him were the *Centgraf*, or centenary, and the *Decanus*, or tything-man. In Saxony the inferior territorial jurisdiction was in the hands of the vice-counts, who were freemen but not necessarily of noble birth.

Charlemagne caused the judicial assessors, "*Scabini*" or "*Schöffen*," to be named by the Count in conjunction with the Imperial Commissioner. The privileges of the freemen were, however, left intact. Under Charlemagne the authority of the law was to a great extent maintained, but during the reigns of

³ "Ueberall verordnete Karl in den Gerichten Schöffen." Wigand, p. 279.

his successors the Count lost all his judicial influence, and at the same time that of the communities became less and less, as the clergy, the monasteries, and the high nobility assumed to themselves privileges which removed them from the jurisdiction of the communities. A superior power, that of a Duke, was then found necessary to restore vigour to the courts; but during the long and unfortunate reign of Henry IV. justice again became a prey to violence.

In the Middle Ages the superior court was originally held only in the particular county which exercised high judicial authority in the name of the King, or under "*Königsbann*." In the Centgraviates, called in Saxony and in Westphalia "*Gogerichte*," there was only a petty court of justice, to which the nobles were not subject; for throughout the Middle Ages the rule was maintained that every one, to whatever rank he might belong, could only be judged by his peers; so that the general principle of the administration of justice by the communities still formed the basis of judicial proceedings in Germany.

Justice, therefore, remained the living property of the people, and its code originated amongst themselves by custom and tradition⁴.

The Vehmgerichte of Westphalia afford us a deep insight into the spirit of the times. There the institutions of Charlemagne did not pass away so early as in other parts of the German Empire.

In Westphalia the ancient system of society remained intact long after that the rest of Europe had been brought under a different order of things—the Feudal System.

The freemen still preserved their most important privileges, and the *placitum* of the Duke was still open to all the inha-

⁴ "*Alles Recht*," says Wigand, "*war Gewohnheit in das Leben des Volks verwachsen*." And again, "*Im ganzen Mittelalter wurde mit Strenge am Altherkömmlichen erhalten*."

bitants. In the thirteenth century, the *placitum* fell into disuse, but the community of freemen still continued, and they remained the immediate subjects of the Emperor, under the judicial authority of an imperial tribunal composed of themselves, and under an imperial president. Then the vice-count took the title of "Freigraf," or Free Count, to distinguish him from the territorial lords, and his *Scabini* were called *Freischöffen*, or Free Judges.

All freemen in Westphalia could become "Freischöffen," and the district of their jurisdiction was called a Free County, as distinguished from that of the territorial lords. The Free Count was invested with judicial authority by the Emperor, or in his name by the Duke, and he pronounced sentence as imperial judge. The direct relation between the Emperor and the freemen in a country where the lords of the soil had drawn to themselves all the sovereign rights, is to be explained by the great respect the Saxons ever paid to the old national laws, and by the particular constitution of the territorial nobility in Westphalia, which was favourable to the power of the freemen. Westphalia chiefly belonged to ecclesiastical lords, who were more disposed than the laity to respect the rights of free communities which did not submit to the Feudal System.

After the fall of Henry the Lion, the nobility attempted to destroy the "Freegraviates," but in vain. These "Freegraviates" were in reality nothing more than the continuation of the old German "Gau," or district jurisdiction. The free town of Dortmund, which in the time of Charlemagne had been the judicial capital of Westphalia, still possessed the supreme Free Tribunal, and it was there that the Free Counts assembled in general Chapter to found *Weisthümer* or principles of law, to examine the judgments of the Free Tribunals, and to confirm them or set them aside when an appeal had been entered against them. The Westphalian Tribunals exercised

a civil as well as a criminal jurisdiction⁵; the latter comprehended all crimes against God, against man, against right, and against the ten commandments, and in course of time became most important for the protection it gave to life, honour, and property. As they administered justice in the name of the Emperor and by the law of life and death, they extended their jurisdiction in criminal matters beyond the limits of Westphalia; and with reason, as there existed no other tribunal in Germany from which justice could be obtained. Such influence did these tribunals acquire that at length no cases arose which could not be brought before them if the defendant refused to do honour and justice to the plaintiff. Thus in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the power of the Vehmgerichte extended over all parts of Germany, as far as Prussia and Livonia, whilst all complaints even from the most distant districts had to be brought before a Westphalian tribunal, and it was upon Westphalian ground that the accused person was forced to appear.

No such tribunal could exist beyond that country, which in the Middle Ages included all that part of Germany which was between the Rhine and the Weser⁶. Originally only Westphalians, and of these none but the ancient free-born "Schöffen," could be constituted judges; but, later on, all free and honourable men could be received as Free Judges, and men

⁵ "Das Femgericht nicht bloß ein zum Schrecken der Verbrecher errichtetes Criminalgericht war, sondern auch eine Civilcompetenz übte." Wigand, p. 314.

The crimes the Schöffen originally had to punish were:—

1. Ketzerei—Heresy.
2. Abfall vom Christenthum—Apostasy from Christianity.
3. Falscher Eid—Perjury.
4. Zauberei—Witchcraft.

Eventually they assumed a jurisdiction over:—"Alles was gegen die zehn Gebote Gottes und das heilige Evangelium, gegen den Christlichen Glauben, gegen Gott, Ehre, und Recht ist."

⁶ "Was in den Rechtsbüchern der Femschöffen *Westphalens* oder die *rothe Erde* genannt wird, begreift fast den ganzen Winkel zwischen Weser und Rhein." Berck, p. 184.

of all ranks and from all parts of the country were eager to participate in the privileges of the Society.

This contributed in no small degree to ensure the long possession of power to the Secret Tribunals.

Social position had nothing to do with the choice of members; the peasant and the prince, the citizen and the knight, were all equally admitted into the fraternity. The only conditions of admission were, that the candidate should be born in lawful wedlock of free parents, and that he should be of the Christian religion and of unblemished character, and two members had to be surety for his good conduct. At his reception the candidate knelt down bare-headed, and laying the thumb and middle finger of his right hand on the sword of the president, pronounced the following oath: "I promise perpetual devotion to the Free Tribunal, and to keep the secrets of the Holy Vehm from wife and child, from father and mother, from sister and brother, from fire and wind, from all that the rain covers and the sun shines on, from all that is between the sky and the ground, and to strengthen this tribunal and its jurisdiction with all my senses and power; so help me God and all His saints!"

The reception could only take place in Westphalia; even the Emperor could only admit "*Freischöffen*" in that country, upon the so-called *rothe Erde* or red earth⁷. The Emperor Wenceslaus, who endeavoured to establish a Vehmgericht in Bohemia, was warned by the Free Judges that any one taking part in it would incur the penalty of death. A "*Freischöffe*" could only be cited before a *Freigericht* or free tribunal, and great weight was given to his word and oath.

⁷ This mystic appellation is supposed by some to refer to the colour of the field in the Ducal shield of Saxony; others again regard it as synonymous with "the bloody earth." Wigand thinks it marks the difference between tribunals held in halls and palaces, and those which were held on the old free "*Malstatte*" under the free open sky. Wigand, p. 276.

Even Emperors were subject to the ordinary reception, and could not preside in a Vehmic tribunal until they had been initiated: one exception was made in their favour; they could be initiated at their coronation at Aix-la-Chapelle, although that city was not in Westphalia. In 1429, we find that the Emperor Sigismund was solemnly admitted into the fraternity at Dortmund. The members of the Vehmgerichte had secret signs and a secret language, by which to recognize each other, whence, as well as from their knowledge of the laws, the initiated were called the *Wissende*, the knowing.

A MS. found at Herfort in Westphalia has the mysterious letters S. S. G. G., which are supposed to have a secret meaning, but their interpretation as *Stock*, or *Strick*, *Stein*, *Gras*, and *Grein*, is not intelligible. Agricola, in a work on ancient German proverbs, states that the Free Judges when at table turned the handles of their knives away from them and the points towards them. There is, however, as might well be imagined, no precise information as to their secret signs or passwords⁸.

These tribunals may be considered as having reached their highest power about the middle of the fourteenth century; when they had become a most important barrier against the rude and brutal force of lawless wrong. Their solemn oath held all the members firmly united in one common bond; not even in the confessional were they allowed to reveal a secret of the Vehmic Tribunal, and the clergy were not admitted into it. Originally, the uninitiated were not taken at once before the *Heimliches Acht*, or Secret Tribunal, but before the ancient tribunal of the community, where every freeman could be present. But if the person who had been cited did not appear, or if he could not clear himself from the charge brought

⁸ Æneas Silvius, "De Statu Europæ," l. cxxix., says, "Secretos habent ritus et arcana quædam—ea nondum repertus est quispiam qui vel pretio, vel metu revelaverit." See also Freherus, "De Secretis Judiciis," p. 5.

against him, he was taken before the Closed or Secret Tribunal, which was merely so called because the initiated alone had the privilege of being present. Any other person who ventured to appear was immediately hanged. The place of meeting was generally the ancient palace court of the *Grafs* or Counts, upon a mountain or hill, whence the eye could command a view of the whole surrounding country; and the courts were held in the daytime under the shade of the neighbouring trees.

The Free Count ascended the seat of justice; before him lay a sword, the symbol of supreme jurisdiction, the form of which represented the Cross of Christ; next to it was the withy or cord, as a sign of right over life and death⁹. The Count then opened the court. He called the *Schöffen* round him and assigned to them their places. The deepest silence reigned throughout the assembly, while the person who had been cited before the tribunal stepped forward, accompanied by his two sureties.

The judge stated the accusation, and the prisoner, if initiated, was allowed to depart in peace if he swore upon the cross of the sword (the legal oath of purification) that he was innocent¹. "He shall then take a *Kreuzpfennig*, or cross-penny," says an ancient work, "throw it at the feet of the judge, and go his way. Whoever attacks him, or touches him, breaks the King's peace."

The uninitiated could not clear themselves in this manner; in their case, the truth of the accusation was determined by the evidence. The ancient proceeding with the genuine "*Freischöffen*" was thus originally simple enough. In later

⁹ "Vor ihm lag das Schwerdt—Symbol der höchsten Gerichtsbarkeit und zugleich Kreuzeszeichen durch seine Form—so dann die Wyd oder der Strick." Wigand, p. 364.

¹ "Der angeklagte hatte das Recht zu schwören dasz er unschuldig sei—er legte seine zwei Finger auf das Kreuz des Schwerdtes und sagte, 'Herr Graf, ich bin unschuldig.'" Wigand, p. 378.

times, this straightforward manner seems to have become quite changed, for the plaintiff could oppose and destroy the validity of the oath of the defendant by three witnesses; the latter could then oppose with six; if the accuser appeared with fourteen, the defendant required twenty-one witnesses in order to clear himself. If the defendant acknowledged his guilt, or if the plaintiff convicted him by oath and by witnesses, the *Schöffen* gave judgment.

When the criminal was sentenced to death, he was immediately hanged upon the nearest tree.

Such was the proceeding when the accused obeyed the citation he had received, but if he did not appear at the third summons he was considered as having confessed his crime, or as one who despised justice and peace, and the sentence of condemnation was pronounced against him by the Count in these terrible terms: "I denounce him here by all the royal power and force, as is commanded by the royal ban. I deprive him as outcast and banished of all the peace, justice, and freedom he has ever enjoyed since baptism, and I deprive him henceforward of the enjoyment of the four elements. I declare him condemned and lost. He shall enjoy neither law nor justice; and I herewith curse his flesh and blood. May his body never receive burial, but may it be carried away by the wind, and may the ravens, the crows, and wild birds of prey consume and destroy him. His neck I adjudge to the halter, and his body to be the prey of the birds and beasts of the air, sea, and land; but may God have mercy upon his soul²."

To prevent innocent persons from becoming the victims of mere private revenge, without the knowledge of the *Vehmgerichte*, a book was kept called the *Blutbuch*, or "Book of Blood," in which were inscribed the names of those on whom sentence had been passed. The banished man was now in the condition of a criminal condemned to death and waiting for

² Hahn, "Die Femgerichts Westphalens Ordnungen," p. 634.

execution. Whosoever sheltered or even warned him was taken before the tribunal. Even so slight a warning as to say to him, "*Es wäre anderswo eben so gut Brot essen oder Pfennige zehren als hier*," "You can eat bread, or spend your money, as well elsewhere as here," was punishable with death. The initiated themselves were bound by the most terrible oaths, and by the penalty of death, to conceal the judgment which had been passed; and even if the condemned man was a brother³, or father, the member dared not warn him of his danger, and each of the initiated to whom the sentence had been conveyed was bound to help to put it into execution. Wherever the *Verfehnte* or banished man was found, whether in a house, in the open street, the high road, or in the forest, he was at once hanged on the nearest tree or post. As a sign that he was put to death in execution of the sentence of the Holy Vehmie Tribunal, and was not murdered by robbers, a knife was stuck in the ground close beside him.

Among other privileges, the Schöffen of this secret court possessed that of hanging without trial every criminal taken in the act; but for this the visible evidence of the act was necessary, and at least three of the initiated Schöffen had to be present to testify against the offender, and to judge and to condemn him. The terrific power of this fraternity may well excite our astonishment, and we can at the same time easily comprehend how such formidable traditions of the Vehmgerichte have been preserved in the mouths of the people. The plain historical description of their proceedings is sufficiently striking without the aid of romance. A fraternity which numbered in its ranks so many thousand men, all bound by solemn oaths to support the cause of justice and of truth; who judged in the name of the Emperor and of the Holy Empire,

³ Berck, "Geschichte der Westphälischen Fengerichte," p. 289.

⁴ "Non frater a fratre, non hospes ab hospite tutus," says Berck, p. 290.

and who reached the criminal wherever he might be, and after the lapse of many years, could not fail to have a salutary and powerful influence in times of lawless violence.

The Prince, or knight, who despised the sentences of the Imperial Court, and who from behind the walls of his castle even defied the Emperor himself, must have trembled "when in the silence of the night he heard the voices of the Freischöffen at the gate of his castle, and when the Free Count summoned him to appear at the ancient 'Malplatz,' or plain under the lime-tree, or on the bank of a rivulet upon the dreaded soil, the Westphalian, or red ground⁵."

The power of the Vehmgerichte was not exaggerated by the terror of their contemporaries. They spared no one; and their citations were issued against the highest in the land.

In 1470 three Free Counts summoned even the Emperor Frederick III. himself, his Chancellor, and the Aulic Council to appear before their tribunal. So vast an influence could not long remain unabused. In the great development and extension of the association, unworthy individuals succeeded in being received as members, and merely used the power of the fraternity as a means of satisfying their revenge, or their hatred; and there can be little doubt that the names of many of the persons who were executed during this period, notwithstanding that the knife was stuck in the ground beside them, never were inscribed in the *Blutbuch* of the Vehmgerichte. These tribunals had been able as imperial courts to extend their jurisdiction over the whole of Germany during the stormy con-

⁵ "Hæc sunt loca dicta Dynstede, in . . . sub Tilia, in . . . in curiâ, super rivum, super stratam, apud lapidem, in quibus presidere iudicio antiquitus est consuetum." Kindlinger, Münst. Beit. iii. 85.

These are the same places where the Carolingian Count held his *placita*, and where the assemblies of the German community took place. There is only one instance recorded of a Vehmgericht being held underground, viz., at Heineberg; in almost every instance these courts were held in broad daylight and in the open air.

fusion of the times, and through the absence of any other efficient judicial institutions; but their power sank before the authority of the Imperial Courts of Justice, and as order was restored, their citations ceased to have any effect.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century complaints arose in several parts of the empire, and particularly from the clergy, against the Vehmgerichte. The whole spirit of modern times was against them. The authority of the Lords of the soil had increased, and had become confirmed; they could not endure that their subjects should be judged by a strange (although originally an imperial) tribunal.

Princes, nobles, and cities formed alliances against the Westphalian Fraternities; and when the Imperial Chamber of Justice, and a new criminal tribunal, were introduced, the study of law and jurisprudence was substituted for a knowledge of the ancient customs; and the power of the Secret Tribunals gradually dwindled away, without any formal abrogation, so that it would be as difficult to fix the last as it would be to trace the first year of its existence. As late as the year 1811, the French Government abolished the *Freigericht* of Gehmen in Münster; and but a few years ago there were still living some peasants who had taken the oath of the "Freischöffen," who annually met in secret, and who boasted that they were the last descendants of Charlemagne's freemen.

The free judges disappeared from the political scene of Germany, but their spirit survived them, and the *Illuminati* of modern times have been regarded as their direct descendants.

The secret association of the *Purrahs* among the Foollahs on the west coast of Africa bears a striking resemblance to the Vehmgerichte. Each of the five tribes of this people has a separate Purrah, to which only persons who have reached the age of thirty can be initiated, and out of these different societies is formed the supreme Purrah. The number of initiated is said to be more than six thousand. The trials of

initiation are long and severe, and all the elements are employed to test the courage of the candidates.

Golberry, in his "*Voyage en Afrique*," says, "On assure même que des lions et des léopards enchainés servent à ces mystères; que les bois sacrés retentissent de hurlemens épouvantables, et que des indiscrets qui ont voulu y pénétrer ont disparu sans que depuis on en ait eu la moindre connaissance."

A member who violates his oath or commits a crime is at once doomed to death. When he least expects it, an armed man in disguise approaches him and says, "The great Purrah sends thee death;" at these words every one abandons him to his fate, and he is immediately killed.

The *Beati Paoli* in Sicily, like the Secret Tribunals of Westphalia, aimed at checking oppression and injustice. Very little is known of this fraternity, but its memory was long revered by the Sicilians, who when they suffered some injury for which they could not obtain redress, used to exclaim, "*Ah, se fossero ancora i Beati Paoli!*" "Would that the Beati Paoli still existed!" The Beati Paoli, like other associations founded in times of anarchy and violence, died away when order and law were established.

VI.

In the history of the Middle Ages, France offers a singular spectacle. At a time when in Spain the Inquisition ruled over prince and people, in France the Pope obeyed the King. Philip the Fair was a sovereign whom no obstacle could check, no danger could terrify. No sooner was his contest with Boniface the Eighth ended, than he determined to destroy the order of Knights Templars. The Crusades had been the natural result of the great zeal for pilgrimage which had pervaded all classes after the year 1000, when the end of the world was expected. Palestine at this time exercised a wonder-

ful fascination over the minds of all; the Pope had but to unfold the banner of Christianity, and a host of enthusiastic and devoted men rushed to obey the sacred signal. At the very commencement of the Crusades, the necessity of a permanent order, military as well as religious, must have been felt. The Order of the Temple soon arose to defend pious pilgrims, and to guard the Cross of Christ from the attacks of the infidel. In a period of burning faith and blind devotion, this fraternity seems to have been the complete and material personification of the thoughts that haunted men's minds; it daily accomplished what even the kings of Europe performed only once perhaps in their lives, and its mission was the noblest of all missions, the guardianship of the Holy Sepulchre.

The origin of the military orders has been attributed by some to the desire of the warlike classes of feudal society, to obtain the guidance of the religious enthusiasm which had been promoted by the Church; and it is probable that this became a ruling principle of the chiefs soon after their establishment⁶. The jealousy with which they were looked upon by both the Church and the Crown may be explained by the fact of their having become in a very peculiar manner the expression of the independence, and of the ill-regulated valour of the feudal nobles. When the Christian kingdom of Palestine had been destroyed, the Knights of St. John wisely disarmed the enmity of the royal and ecclesiastical powers, by assuming a difficult and dangerous post at Rhodes, from whence to repel Mohammedan invaders. The Teutonic knights turned their arms against the barbarian tribes on the north-eastern frontiers of the German Empire, and at length merged into the general political organization of their adopted country.

But the Templars, while they abandoned the struggle in the East, at the same time attempted to retain and increase their power in the states of Western Europe. The necessity for the

⁶ M. Fauriel, "*Histoire des Croisades*."

existence of such bodies as military monks had passed away. Except perhaps in Spain and Portugal, these wealthy, independent military republics established in the very heart of their dominions, may have seemed fraught with danger to regular national governments.

The order of the Templars would appear to have survived its natural existence, and to have excited the jealous hostility of the civil and religious authorities, and the angry suspicion of the community. Its destruction is the most horrible episode of this epoch. One's courage fails on entering this labyrinth of iniquities, where a feeble ray of light only serves to make the infamy of the executioners more apparent, without revealing the innocence of the victims.

Uncertainty seems to preside over this part of history ; the motives of the persecution, the crimes imputed to the accused, their confessions, their retractations, and finally their heroic death, all combine to shroud the truth in mystery.

The purity of the institution of these military orders was no doubt soon lost ; so abnormal an association as that of soldier and priest could not long continue. Nothing more contrary to nature had been imagined than to impose the ascetic vows of hermits on soldiers destined to an active life of perpetual warfare. Their virtues were corrupted by wealth and greatness ; Syrian luxuries had tainted their morals ; the reverses of the Christian cause in the East had undermined their faith ; the devotedness of early times was lost, or at last only existed on behalf of the order, and not on behalf of Christianity.

Even their intrepid valour, the only virtue which had never failed them, was less employed to defend Christianity than to serve the ambitious purposes of the order.

The loss of Jerusalem, their failures against the infidels, had given a fatal blow to their religious belief ; but the first suspicions of heresy had arisen against the Hospitallers, as appears from a letter of Pope Gregory IX., written in the year

1238⁷. The germ of heresy was however crushed in the Knights of St. John, and left no trace of its existence. These Knights, who were worldly and dissolute, lived like the soldiers of that age ; but that did not concern the clergy, the majority of whom did not lead very regular lives, and it had nothing to do with religious faith.

There is nothing to show that the Court of Rome suspected the Templars before the end of the thirteenth century. On the contrary, the order had deserved its good graces, by taking part against the House of Hohenstauffen. Still there was something strange in the habits of the Templars ; they were not more temperate than the Knights of St. John, as the saying "*bibere templariter*" seems to show ; but they were more reserved ; they lived in proud isolation, practising little charity, less hospitality, and they surrounded all their ceremonies with mystery. They were said to hold nocturnal meetings, from which they excluded all who were not knights, and even to place sentinels on the roof of the church or cloister where they met, to prevent the approach of any stranger⁸. In England there was a popular saying which may be either a reproach of perfidy, or an accusation of an infamous vice⁹.

The Templars themselves confirmed the rumours which were spread about them by their imprudent language. The Master of the House at Laon had frequently said that, in their general Chapters, a thing so secret took place, as would oblige them to kill even the King, if he were to see it by accident. Many who had entered the order, had protested against the ceremonies of admission, or had left it ; others, it was reported, had been thrown into dreadful dungeons. Fatal rumours against the knights spread among the masses who were ill-

⁷ Fleuri, "Histoire Ecclésiastique," t. xvii. p. 223.

⁸ Dupuy, "Histoire de la Condamnation des Templiers," p. 166.

⁹ Concilia Brit., p. 360.

disposed towards them. The people hated their arrogance; the monks were envious of their wealth; the assumption of the power of granting absolution by the heads of the order made the clergy hostile to them; and the Knights of St. John had become their bitterest foes, since the Templars had contemptuously refused an union with them¹. Philip the Fair could satisfy all his desires by their destruction: their treasures excited his cupidity as much as their independence galled his spirit of despotism.

Fifteen thousand knights, who possessed nearly ten thousand manors² in Europe, formed a most formidable power; the Temple at Paris, the centre of the order, vied with the royal palace in strength and splendour: this fortress had served as an asylum for Philip during a revolt; but that was a service which he did not forget or forgive; besides, he suspected the Templars of having promoted the riot. Although they had never attacked Philip, they might do so; for after leaving the Holy Land, a number had gone to Greece, had taken Thessalonica, and had wasted Thrace. He dreaded a power which might seriously endanger a government which was not based on the affection of the people, nor supported by a standing army. In Spain, the Templars and the Knights of St. John had entered into a mutual treaty of protection against the King³. Philip had attempted to gain a secure position by seeking to become affiliated to the order, but his request had been refused.

He now resolved to destroy it.

The Prior of Montfaucon had been condemned for heresy and imprisoned by the Grand Master of the Templars. In prison he met Noffo Dei, a Florentine, and determined in concert

¹ Raynouard, "*Des Chevaliers du Temple*," p. 10.

² Matthew Paris, p. 417, says, "*Habent Templarii in Christianitate novem millia maneriorum.*"

³ Munter, p. 25.

with him to accuse the order of heresy, of immorality, and of alliance with the Saracens⁴.

The King eagerly listened to their charges, but waited two years until he could get the Grand Master into his power.

The Pope, Clement V., tried to avert the coming storm, but in vain.

Jacques de Molai, the Grand Master, arrived from Cyprus at the invitation of the King, with the treasures of the order, 150,000 gold florins and eighteen mules laden with silver⁵. The Templars seem to have had a foreboding of their fate, and had some time before haughtily demanded from the Pope an inquiry into the accusations which were rumoured against them⁶. Philip, who could brook no delay, caused the Templars to be arrested⁷, and sent letters to Edward II. of England, to the Kings of Naples and of Spain, and to the Count of Provence, to inform them of the guilt of the order. The Grand Inquisitor, William Imbert, commenced the interrogation of the prisoners⁸; Clement V. complained bitterly of the conduct of the King, as having violated his prerogative, and sent two cardinals to take possession of the persons and property of the Templars.

Philip, however, obtained from the cruelly-tortured prisoners a great mass of confessions, which prevented the Pope from staying the proceedings against them. Most of them had confessed the denial of Christ and the profanation of the Cross, though they all declared they had protested against it. The avowal of having denied Christ, and of having spat upon the

⁴ Villani, in his "*Istoria Fiorentina*," iv. p. 184, gives in a few words the characters of these two men:—"Uno priore di Monfalcone, uomo di mala vita e eretico, in prigione con uno Noffo Dei dei nostri Fiorentini, uomo pieno d'ogni magagna, siccome uomini disperati d' ogni salute, e maliziosi e rei."

⁵ Raynouard, l. c. p. 45.

⁶ Dupuy, "*Condamnation des Templiers*," p. 117.

⁷ On the 13th of October, A.D. 1307.

⁸ Michelet, "*Procès des Templiers*," ii. p. 275.

Cross, was the chief cause of their ruin, as it kept all men aloof from them. Many confessed that they had been initiated in a strange manner, and that unnatural vices had been enjoined them. The Grand Master indignantly repelled the accusation of such vices, but admitted the denial of Christ⁹.

A knight who had been initiated in England, had been allowed to dispense with this latter ceremony, on promising to declare that he had performed it. He was told by the superior who had received him, that this custom had been introduced by a wicked Grand Master, who, having been taken captive by the infidels, obtained his liberty by denying Christ, and swearing that he would make his brethren do the same. Others declared that the Grand Masters Thomas Berard and Poncelin had introduced this detestable practice; or asserted that it was in imitation and in memory of St. Peter, who thrice denied our Lord, and that this was expressed in act by spitting on the Cross. Michelet, who has adopted this last explanation, regards this denial as nothing more than "one of those symbols, one of those sacred comedies, which the Church employed even in the most solemn rites of religion." The Order of the Temple, which was, says Michelet, "the most expressive type of the genius of the Middle Ages, died because of a symbol no longer understood."

As in the Festival of Fools, men offered up the homage of their own imbecility and infamy to the Church which regenerated them, so perhaps the Order of the Temple also took upon itself the duty of raising a sinner from the depth of his fall.

But so fearful a profanation goes far beyond even the strange licence permitted during the Middle Ages in the festivals and mysteries of the Church.

The first explanation appears the most probable, and the

⁹ They did not deny God, but they denied Jesus Christ as Deity and Redeemer. See Matter, "*Hist. Critique du Gnosticisme*," iii. p. 329.

denial which was at first a form, may at length have become real. The Templars may, in the end, have abjured a God who did not give them victory. This idea may have led many of the knights not to absolute atheism, but to a peculiar creed which was not revealed to the lower ranks of the order. There were strange reports of an idol which the Templars worshipped; it was generally described as a frightful head with a long white beard and sparkling eyes¹. Many declared that they had beheld and worshipped it.

At Carcassonne, a preceptor declared that he had thrice knelt before a golden idol with a silver beard, and at the same time thrice denied Christ and thrice profaned the Cross. Two other knights declared that the idol was made in the likeness of Baphomet (*in figuram Baphometis*), and that the superior who received them kissed the image, saluting it with the Arab word Yallah. This title of Baphomet has received two explanations. It has been regarded by some as a mere corruption of Mahomet; by Von Hammer it has been derived from the Greek (*βαφή μύτιδος*), and explained as signifying "the God who baptizes according to the Spirit," and so the God of Gnostics and Manichæans. These two views would seem to be contradictory with reference to what is termed "the heresy of the Templars." It is probable that these knights began to separate themselves from orthodoxy through the heroic mysticism of the Sangraal², and afterwards, in the period of their reverses, became involved in an utter chaos of morality and religion.

Continual intercourse with the Ismailites, a sect which, born in Islamism, had separated itself from orthodoxy, must have had great influence over the Templars; indeed, the historian of the Assassins does not hesitate to declare that these knights

¹ Wilke, "Geschichte des Tempelherren Ordens," i. p. 367. See also Raynouard, p. 26.

² The Sangraal was said to be the cup which had received our Saviour's blood.

were a mere imitation of that fraternity³; and he argues their identity from the similarity of their dress⁴, of their internal organization, and of their secret doctrines. This idea certainly seems fanciful, but it is probable that the Templars formed for themselves a creed full of ideas and ceremonies, borrowed partly from recent Moslem heresies, partly from old Christian heresies, which had never completely died out in the East.

Some traces of Gnosticism, in an altered and materialized shape, have given rise to a belief that the Templars were connected with the Cathari; but there is no direct connexion between them and the great sect of Cathari, or Albigenses. Much of their creed seemed to resemble Manichæism, but it formed a confusion and degeneration rather than a great religious system. Every Templar was bound to wear next his skin a cord which had been put round the idol, and which was supposed to have a great influence over his religious faith. It was said, "Que si aucun Templier eut eu autour de lui, ceinte ou liée, une *courroie* laquelle c'était leur *mathometerie*, après ce jamais sa foi ne fut reconnue : tant avoit elle sa foi et sa loi affirmée et affichée⁵."

This girdle bears a striking resemblance to the famous *Kosti* or cords prescribed by the Zoroastrian system, which all Magi wore round their bodies, and which had been probably prescribed by Manes in his religion.

The heresy of Europe to which the Templars show most affinity is not that of the Cathari, but rather that of the Luciferi, the worshippers of Satan or Lucifer, who were com-

³ Hammer, "Geschichte der Assassinen," p. 337, "Die Templer in mancher Hinsicht in die Fusztapfen der Assassinen traten." See also "Le Tombeau de Jacques Molai," by Cadet de Gassicourt, p. 24.

⁴ Hammer says that "the accordance of the white dress and red fillets of the Assassins, with the white mantle and red cross of the Templars, is remarkably striking."

⁵ "Vie de Philippe le Bel," c. 66.

pletely opposed to the Cathari, and were connected with the earlier Gnostic sect of the Ophites. In Germany, and many parts of Slavonia, this sect of Luciferi had established itself, and the Stadinghi of Germany, in the thirteenth century, had the same accusations brought against them, as the Templars in the fourteenth⁶.

In the receptions of candidates, traces can be observed of different degrees in the fraternity, for some who refused to submit to the strange ceremonies of initiation were informed that what had shocked them was nothing more than a mere farce⁷. These, however, were never admitted to the general Chapters, which were held with the strictest secrecy, while those who showed a more obedient spirit soon gained admission to them.

The denial of Christ seems generally to have formed part of the ceremony of reception; this most of the candidates at first refused to perform, but afterwards did so, on account of the oath they had previously taken; they, however, declared that they had done so, *ore non corde*, in words, and not in their hearts. This impious rite has been supposed by some to signify an absolute rejection of God; but it was not God the Father, but the crucified Saviour, who died on the cross, that was denied. It is remarkable that the rejection of Christ, and the profanation of the Cross, were so far from being acts of Atheism, that they were accompanied by a special adoration of a head, or idol, the form and material of which have been very variously described⁸. It is an established fact that the tendencies of the order were anti-sacerdotal; that altar was raised against altar; that certain prescribed forms of religion were omitted; that sometimes superiors, even laymen, granted absolution. We must consider the tendency of the human mind from the time

⁶ Raynald, "Annales Eccles.," ann. 1234.

⁷ "Una truffa." See Matter, "Hist. du Gnosticisme," iii. p. 326.

⁸ Raynouard, "Mémoires des Chevaliers du Temple," p. 231.

of the Crusades, and especially at the beginning of the twelfth century; the eagerness with which all doctrines were received, the leaning towards the old errors of the Paulicians, Manichæans, and Gnostics, the opposition every where manifested, even among the Crusaders, to the doctrines and institutions of the Church, the attraction which the Moslem religion appears to have had for many of the Crusaders, and especially for the Templars, some of whom had adopted that creed⁹.

If we compare all these circumstances with the mass of depositions with respect to the heretical ideas, which torture may indeed have extorted from the lips, but could scarcely have created in the minds of the Templars, we shall perhaps be inclined to believe that some of the knights had too intimate relations with the ideas of the contemporary heresies.

It would seem that the act of abjuration exacted from the candidates may have had reference to Jesus Christ, considered as the Crucified Redeemer of mankind; that some of the order disbelieved the expiatory death of our Lord, and declared that "the man Jesus had died merely for his sins," and that they denied the efficacy of the sacraments, and the dogma of transubstantiation, which the Church inculcated.

Thus those who were initiated into the doctrines of the superiors probably professed a belief in God the Father, but rejected God the Son, either like the Moslems, who considered Christ the greatest of prophets, or like the Cathari, Bogomiles, and Paulicians, whose opinions resembled those of the ancient Gnostics¹. The invariable belief of all these sects was that the true God was the unknown Father, and that the mission of Christ had been limited to a revelation of the Father, but that He had not died on the Cross, and that the dogma of redemp-

⁹ Gibbon, "Decline and Fall," c. 54, says, "The favour and success of the Paulicians in the eleventh and twelfth centuries must be imputed to the strong though secret discontent which armed the most pious Christians against the Church of Rome."

¹ See Matter, "Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme," iii. p. 334. Gibbon, c. 54.

tion was an error of those who had misunderstood His spiritual mission, and who had retained the gross ideas of Judaism, and of its expiatory sacrifices. It is possible that the Templars may have adored God the Father under the image of the bearded idol, which among the Paulicians was a representation of the Father.

The different forms of the idol² cannot be explained; some-

Werner, in "Die Söhne des Thals," has some remarkable passages on the idol of the Templars. In the second part called "Die Kreuzesbrüder," there is the following scene, describing part of the ceremony of initiation:—

ARMED MAN.

Take from his back the Cross,
And throw it from thee!

ADALBERT.

How! the Saviour's token!

DEVIL'S HEAD.

Deliver, O deliver me!

ARMED MAN.

This cross
Is not thy master's, not that bloody one:
Its counterfeit is this: throw't from thee!

ADALBERT (*takes it from the Devil's bust, and lays it softly on the ground*).

The cross of the good Lord that died for me?

ARMED MAN.

Thou shalt no more believe in one that died;
Thou shalt henceforth believe in one that liveth,
And never dies!—Obey, and question not,—
Step over it!

ADALBERT.

Take pity on me!

ARMED MAN (*threatens him with his sword*).

Step!

ADALBERT.

I do't with shuddering.

(*Steps over, and looks at the head, which raises itself as if freed from a load.*)

How the figure rises
And looks in gladness!

times it had a bearded head, sometimes a woman's head, sometimes a head without a beard. It is only known that the Paulicians represented Jesus Christ in the likeness of a man of middle age, and the Holy Ghost under the form of a young man.

The theory that the idol was a symbol of a Monotheism in imitation of the Moslem Creed would be overthrown if it could be proved that the word Baphomet applied to it could signify that it was the image of Mahomet; but it is evident that it was not the Prophet whom they worshipped, for even the Mohammedans did not adore the founder of their religion; they only regarded him as the messenger of God; thus the meaning of Baphomet, as used by the Templars, could only signify the image of the God of Mahomet. Raimont d'Agiles uses the word *Baffamurias* to designate a mosque of the Mohammedan religion; besides, the word Allah pronounced before the idol, shows that it was not Mohammed who was thus worshipped. A knight at Florence declared that he was told, "Behold your God and your Mahomet," which has no sense; the words must have been, "Behold your God, the God of Mahomet".³

ARMED MAN.

Him whom thou hast served

Till now, deny!

ADALBERT (*horror-struck*).

Deny the Lord my God?

ARMED MAN.

Thy God 'tis not; the idol of this world!

Deny him, or—thou diest!

ADALBERT.

I deny!

ARMED MAN (*points to the head with his sword*).

Go to the Fallen! Kiss his lips!

See Carlyle's Essay on Werner.

³ Raynouard, "Mémoires Hist. des Chevaliers du Temple," p. 302.

The secret doctrines of those among the Templars who were completely initiated, would thus appear to have been, 1, Monotheism, or belief in one Deity, according to Mohammedanism ; 2, The rejection of the divinity of Christ, and of the doctrine of Transubstantiation ; 3, Hostility towards the clergy.

Matter says, that a close examination of the monumental remains of the Middle Ages may confirm the opinion that the order of the Templars, amongst the fully initiated, professed doctrines contrary to those of pure Christianity⁴. Still, whatever may have been their secret doctrines, the injustice and cruelty of the proceedings against them can never be forgotten, and the execution of so many brave and noble knights will ever stain the memory of Philip the Fair.

They had rendered sufficient services to the Church for the Pope to have undertaken their defence ; but, unfortunately, Clement V. was the mere tool of the King of France⁵.

The order might have been suppressed, if such a step was thought necessary, although this would have been the first instance of such a measure : but the Pope, who had authorized them to unite, could have ordered them to separate. The Templars might have been deprived of their property and possessions, had the King thought that their riches were so great as to endanger the safety of the kingdom ; but it was atrocious that brave and valiant knights should have been tortured and burnt to death, whose very loyalty ought not to have been impeached until they had been allowed to defend and justify themselves from the charges brought against them. The sentence pronounced by the servile Pope seems to allow an eternal doubt to hang over the problem of their guilt⁶.

⁴ "Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme," iii. 342. But see Milman, "History of Latin Christianity," v. p. 361.

⁵ Villani, iv. p. 184, says, "Il Papa per levarsi del dosso il Re di Francia per piacere al Re assenti di ciò fare."

⁶ Raynourard, p. 195, "Non per modum definitivæ sententiæ, sed per viam provisionis et ordinationis apostolicæ."

The memory of this famous but unfortunate fraternity has been the object of the alternate praise and censure of successive historians; the study of the original documents may perhaps lead to the condemnation of the order in a moral point of view, though with great reservations; but if we impartially regard the judges and the accused, we can only condemn the former, and consider the latter as mere martyrs to the cupidity⁷ and ambition of Philip. Dante alludes to this when he says:—

“Veggio 'l nuovo Pilato si crudele
Che ciò no 'l sazia; ma senza decreto
Porta nel Tempio le cupide vele.”

In England, the Templars who persisted in their innocence were imprisoned in monasteries; in Italy, their fate was various; in Germany, according to Michelet, the knights justified themselves after the manner of the Westphalian Free Judges⁸, and were allowed to remain in peace; in Spain, they joined military orders which were specially destined to fight the Moors; and in Portugal, the Order of Christ was only that of the Templars revived under another name⁹.

No doubt many of the knights in the provinces of France remained securely concealed, and while their superiors were suffering death at the stake may have reunited in obscurity the bonds of fraternity. It is scarcely possible that all the traditions of so powerful an order can have been swept away at once; indeed the modern French “Templiers” pretend to have kept up the succession of Grand Masters unbroken, and

⁷ Villani, iv. p. 184, says very plainly, “Il quale mosso per avarizia si fece promettere dal Papa segretamente di disfare la detta ordine de' Templieri, opponendo contra à loro molti articoli di resia: ma più si dice che fù *per trarre di loro molta moneta*.”

⁸ Michelet, “Symbolique du Droit.”

⁹ Giustiniani, “Istoria degli Ordini Militari,” ii. p. 628 “Furono gettati gli fondamenti di quest' ordine glorioso sopra le rendite opulenti de' soppressi Templieri.” See an Essay by M. Carrea de Serra in the “Archives Littéraires de l'Europe,” t. vii.

consider themselves the direct descendants of the Order of the Knights Templars, of which some remains can perhaps be traced in Scotland¹: and in Germany, where, instead of strange and baphometric rites, a kind of mysticism mingled with Alchemy and Cabalism arose—that of the Rosicrucians—which in turn disappeared, when modern Freemasonry took its place.

VII.

Thus the fall of the Knights Templars has been connected with the origin of the Freemasons, and the idea has prevailed that the only secret purpose of the latter was the re-establishment of the suppressed order. Jacques de Molai, while a prisoner in Paris, is said to have created four new lodges, and the day after his execution, eight knights, disguised as *masons*, are said to have gone to gather up the ashes of their late Grand Master². To conceal their designs, the new Templars assumed the symbols of the trade, but took, it is said, the name of *Francs* “*Maçons*” to distinguish themselves from ordinary craftsmen, and also in memory of the general appellation given to them in Palestine. Even the allegories of Freemasonry, and the ceremonies of its initiations, have been explained by a reference to the history of the persecutions of the Templars. The Abbé Barruel says, that “every thing—the signs, the language, the names of grand master, of knight, of temple—all, in a word, betray the Freemasons as descendants of the proscribed knights³.” Lessing, in Germany, gave some authority to this opinion, by asserting positively that “the lodges of the Templars were in the very highest repute in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and that out of such a lodge,

¹ Eckert, “*Die Heidenkirche*,” p. 364, says, that the knights who escaped assembled in one of the Hebrides, and there re-organized their fraternity.

² “*Le Tombeau de Jacques Molai*,” by Cadet de Gassicourt, pp. 17–20.

³ Barruel, “*Mémoires du Jacobinisme*,” ii. 391. See “*Le Tombeau de Jacques Molai*,” p. 110.

which had been constantly kept up in London, was established the society of Freemasons, in the seventeenth century, by Sir Christopher Wren ⁴."

Lessing is of opinion that the name *Mason* has nothing to do with the English meaning of the word, but comes from *Massoney*, a "lodge" of the Knights Templars.

This idea may have caused the Freemasons to amalgamate the external ritual of the Templars with their own, and to found the higher French degrees which have given colour to the very hypothesis which gave rise to their introduction. But the whole story appears to be most improbable, and only rests upon the slight foundation of fancied or accidental analogies.

Attempts have also been made to show that the Freemasons are only a continuation of the fraternities of architects which are supposed to have originated at the time of the building of Solomon's Temple.

The Egyptian priests are supposed to have taught those who were initiated a secret and sacred system of architecture ⁵; this is said to have been transmitted to the Dionysiac architects, of whom the first historical traces are to be found in Asia Minor ⁶, where they were organized into a secret fraternity. Clavel says that if the Jews had not learnt the art earlier, it was introduced among them at the time of the building of the Temple of Solomon ⁷. It is, however, a mere matter of speculation whether the Jewish and Dionysiac architects were closely connected, but there is some analogy

⁴ Lessing, "Fortsetzung der Ernst und Falk," p. 53, quoted by Nicolaï in his "Versuch über die Beschuldigungen der Tempelherren," p. 161 of the French translation.

⁵ Röber, "Beiträge zur Erforschung der geometrischen Grundformen in den alten Tempeln Ägyptens."

⁶ Clavel, "Histoire Pittoresque de la Franc-maçonnerie," p. 78.

⁷ See Wiebeking, "Mémoire sur l'Architecture du Moyen Age," p. 7. Basnage, "Histoire des Juifs, Livre des Caraïtes."

between the latter, and the Roman guilds, which Numa is said to have first introduced⁸, and which were probably the prototypes of the later associations of masons which flourished until the end of the Roman Empire.

The hordes of barbarians which then ruthlessly swept away whatever bore the semblance of luxury and elegance, did not spare the noblest specimens of art, and it was only when they became converted to Christianity, that the guilds were re-established. During the Lombard rule they became numerous in Italy; the most celebrated were those of Como, and such was their superiority, says Muratori, that the title of "*Magistri Comacini*" became the general name for all such societies of architects⁹. As their numbers increased, Lombardy no longer sufficed for the exercise of their art, and they travelled into all the countries where Christianity, only recently established, required religious buildings.

The Popes, whose policy it was, to aid the propagation of faith by the spectacle of beautiful churches and of splendid monasteries, gave them special privileges and immunities.

These associations, however, became nearly crushed by the power of the monastic institutions, so that in the early part of the Middle Ages the words artist and priest became nearly synonymous; but in the twelfth century they emancipated themselves, and sprang into new life. The names of the authors of the great architectural creations of this period are almost all unknown; for these were not the work of individuals, but of fraternities.

The aim of these men was the same as that of those ascetics who lived a life of solitude and of self-denial; the same as that of the pilgrims, who wandered over the world, passing from sanctuary to sanctuary; they also wished to secure for

⁸ See Plutarch's Life of Numa," c. 17: Κοινωνίας δὲ καὶ συνόδους καὶ θεῶν τιμὰς ἀποδοὺς ἐκδότῳ γένει προέβουσαν."

⁹ Muratori, vi. 350.

themselves an eternal life of happiness, but by a wiser and more glorious work, that of embellishing the dwelling-place of man with the noblest edifices. In their hands art did not become less religious—it was even more so, as it became more ideal: the artists clung with reverence to whatever had a mystic or emblematic signification.

The development of the Gothic art was contemporaneous with the rise of political freedom among the people; liberty seemed to form a common bond of sympathy, for emancipated art was eagerly welcomed by the enfranchised cities. Its principle is to be found in the word *Libertas*, inscribed on the porch of the Cathedral of Chartres¹.

Ecclesiastical buildings did not alone engage these associations; in France, the "Frères Pontifes," founded by St. Benezet, occupied themselves in the truly fraternal work of facilitating the relations and intercourse of different peoples. The bridge over the Rhone at Avignon was one of their finest works.

In England guilds of masons are said to have existed in the year 926, but this tradition is not supported by history; in Scotland similar associations were established towards the end of the fifteenth century.

The Abbé Grandidier regards Freemasonry as nothing more than a servile imitation of the ancient and useful fraternity of true masons established during the building of the Cathedral of Strasburg, one of the masterpieces of Gothic architecture, and which caused the fame of its builders to spread throughout Europe². In many towns similar fraternities were established. These associations were organized into three classes—apprentices, fellow-crafts, and masters; they are said to have had secret words and signs, which they called

¹ See Gilbert, "Histoire de la Cathédrale de Chartres."

² See the "Essai sur les Illuminés," par M. de Luchet, pp. 165—167. Also J. B. Robertson's "Lectures on Modern History," pp. 422—426.

"*Das Wortzeichen*," and a peculiar grip, "*Der Grusz*," by which to recognize each other. The place where they assembled was called a *Hütte*, a word equivalent to our lodge, and the Guild of Strasburg had supreme authority over all the rest. The documents which refer to architectural corporations in France are very few, yet there are many traces of their existence, and modern French historians³ speak eloquently in favour of such fraternities, which are supposed to have lasted until the sixteenth century, about which period the judicial authority of the Guild at Strasburg became greatly diminished, and ceased entirely in the year 1707. In that year a law passed by the Diet of the Empire decreed that all disputes which should arise among the masons should be submitted to the decision of the ordinary civil tribunals.

Even before this act, the masonic guilds had greatly declined. Luther, when he gave a shock to the very foundations of the Papal power, at the same time destroyed the vitality of these associations; doubt seized the minds of many, and few were willing to undertake the construction of splendid edifices which required a fervent religious feeling, and costly sacrifices: thus many of them were dissolved.

They do not seem to have differed essentially from the ordinary trade-guilds, and are said not to have been in any way secret fraternities⁴.

The theory that Gothic architecture owes its sudden and simultaneous rise to secret societies of architects, depositaries of a concealed and traditionary science, has been almost universally rejected, and cannot be supported by historical proof⁵.

³ Henri Martin, "*Histoire de France*," iii. 311.

⁴ King, "*Gnostics and their Remains*," p. 190.

⁵ Milman, "*Hist. of Latin Christianity*," vi. 588, says, "This theory is as unnecessary as it is without support." Schnaase, "*Geschichte der Bauenden Kunst*," iv. c. 5, also rejects the theory.

VIII.

The origin of the Freemasons of the present day is not to be attributed to these fraternities, but to the Rosicrucians, who first appeared at the beginning of the seventeenth century. According to the traditions of the latter, the founder of their society was a German called Christian Rosenkreuz, who was born in 1387, and who, during his travels in the Holy Land, had lived with sage Chaldæans, and had learned from them the occult sciences, especially Magic and Cabalism, and on his return to Europe, he initiated some chosen friends into the new science.

Such was the establishment of this association,⁷ according to its history, which was published early in the seventeenth century, before which time even the name of Rosicrucian had never been mentioned. The Rosicrucians, however, claimed to have originated in the remotest antiquity. They invented for themselves a theosophic filiation up to the times of King Hiram, of Solomon, and of the mythical Taut: but Semler, who has endeavoured to establish the antiquity of this fraternity, has not been able to find any conclusive evidence on this point.

In his "*Historie der Rosenkreuzer*" he merely informs us that there existed in the fourteenth century an association of Alchemists, who combined together for the purpose of discovering the philosopher's stone. He adds, that in 1591 an alchemist called Nicholas Barnaud conceived the idea of forming an hermetic society, and that he travelled throughout Germany and France with this object. In the "*Echo Fraternitatis, R.C.*," we are told that in 1597 an attempt was made to establish a secret society of theosophists, who were to pursue the study of Cabalistic science. There is, however, no sufficient evidence to support the pretensions of the Rosicrucians to antiquity⁸. Towards the end of the sixteenth century Cabal-

⁷ Semler, "*Historie der Rosenkreuzer*," p. 35. Figuier, "*L'Alchimie et les Alchimistes*," p. 264. The fact that the "*Fama Fraternitatis*," which seems to

ism and Alchemy had overspread all Western Europe, and more especially Germany. There was at this time a very prevalent idea that a general reformation would take place in the world previous to the last judgment.

Theophrastes Paracelsus, the greatest writer of the period, and whose influence was immense, prophesied that after the death of the Emperor Rudolph II., three treasures which had long lain concealed would be discovered. About A.D. 1610 three works appeared which seem to have prepared the way for the foundation of a distinct fraternity of Rosicrucians.

Individual Cabalists and Theosophists no doubt existed much earlier in Germany, but it does not appear that there was any organized society either of Rosicrucians or Freemasons before this time.

The three works which might seem to be the fulfilment of the prophecy of Paracelsus were :

1. "A General Reformation of the Whole Wide World." In this the seven wise men of Greece, together with Cato and Seneca, are summoned by Apollo to Delphi to devise some remedy for the miserable state of mankind. After many schemes had been discussed, that of Seneca was approved, which proposed that a society should be formed out of all ranks, secretly to labour for the welfare of mankind.

Thales had previously made the extraordinary proposition, "jedem Mensch ein Loch in die Brust zu schneiden, und ein kleines Fenster hinein zu setzen, damit man ihm in's Herz sehen könne," to cut a hole in every man's breast, and to place a small window there, so that all might look into his heart⁷.

2. In the second book, the "Fama Fraternitatis" gave the history of the founder of such a secret society composed of eight be the gospel of the Rosicrucians, appeared at the same date with the fraternity itself, seems unanswerable; and it is evident that they both belong to the same period.

⁷ Buhle, "Die Rosenkreuzer," p. 129. "Raguagli di Parnaso," di Trajano Boccalini, p. 329.

members, whose meetings took place in a building called the "House of the Holy Ghost," which had been erected by Christian Rosenkreuz. The members of the society were to heal the sick without reward, and it seems that they professed to cure all diseases by the influence of faith, and of the imagination. A true Rosicrucian had but to look upon a sick man, and he was healed that very moment¹. They were to meet once a year, and to take the letters R.C. as their distinguishing seal, watchword, and title; and each member, when he felt the approach of death, was to appoint his successor.

The fraternity was to remain unrevealed for one hundred and twenty years: at the end of that time the brethren found, in the House of the Holy Ghost, a door with the inscription, *Post CXX annos patebo*, "After a hundred and twenty years I shall open." On opening it they discovered a seven-sided vault, lighted by an artificial sun in the centre of the roof².

A circular altar had the words *A. C. R. C. hoc universi compendium vivus mihi sepulchrum feci*; "Living, I made this abstract of the universe my tomb."

The inscriptions seem to show a deep religious feeling in the so-called fraternity. On the margin was *Jesus mihi omnia*—Jesus is all to me; and in the centre were four figures in a circle, round which were inscribed the words *Nequaquam vacuum*, never void; *Legis jugum*, the yoke of the law; *Libertas Evangelii*, the liberty of the Gospel; *Dei gloria intacta*, the unsullied glory of God.

Under the altar the brethren found the body of Rosenkreuz, uncorrupted: in his right hand was a book written in golden letters, which they preserved as sacred¹. In it was related the death of Christian Rosenkreuz², and at the end were the names of those present at the time.

¹ Sprengel, "Histoire de la Médecine," iii. p. 14. See Bulwer's "Zanoni."

² See the "Fama Fraternitatis," pp. 23. 25.

¹ Buhle, "Die Rosenkreuzer," p. 135.

² "Fama Fraternitatis," p. 27, "Non morbo ullo pellente sed spiritû Dei evo-

3. The third book, "Confessio Fraternitatis Rosæ Crucis," states that the order had several degrees, not only men of rank and fortune, but also humble persons who were willing to promote the objects of the society, and that it possessed more gold and silver than all the world can give, but that true philosophy was the great object of the institution.

In the "Fama Fraternitatis" the surviving disciples call upon the learned and devout who are willing to co-operate with them in their projects of reform to join them.

They describe themselves as true Protestants, and as very zealous on behalf of their religion; indeed, at this time, when the thirty years' war was raging in Germany, there could be no compromise between the two great divisions of Christianity.

Fludd says, in his "Apologia Compendiaria," "Thus Lutherans, Calvinists, and others of the same kind, thus also the Brothers, because they condemn the Pope as well as Mahomet, are to be deemed heretics if we believe the vain threats of Papists."

They declare that they contemplate no political revolution against the reigning powers, their sole aim being the diminution of human suffering, the advancement of learning and science. They assert that they have the power of making gold, together with other secrets, but by their wealth they set little store³. They possess arcana in comparison with which the secrets of the Alchemists are a mere trifle, all of which they wish to employ for the benefit of mankind⁴.

They declare that their philosophy was nothing new, but such as was received by Adam after the fall, and practised by Moses and Solomon⁵.

cante, illuminatam animam (inter fratrum amplexus) Creatori Deo reddidit. A suis ad cxx. annos hic absconditus est."

³ "Fama Fraternitatis," p. 32, "Und sagen wir Pfuh *aurum in quantum aurum*."

⁴ See L. Figuier, "L'Alchimie et les Alchimistes," p. 267.

⁵ "Fama Fraternitatis," p. 30, "Unser Philosophie ist nichts neues, sondern wie sie Adam nach seinem Fall erhalten und Moses und Solomon geübet."

The idea of the Society may well have been suggested by the Solomon's House in the "New Atlantis" of Bacon.

The three works produced a great sensation throughout Germany; many addressed printed letters to the brethren; but these remained unanswered. Some of these letters have been preserved in the Library of Göttingen.

In the mean time, impostors every where pretended to be Rosicrucians, and traded on the popular credulity. Libavius, in his "*Examen Philosophiæ Novæ*," was the first to write against the fraternity; he declared that it was impossible to effect reforms by such means, and he called upon the different governments to check the disorders produced by impostors; but the belief in the existence of a Rosicrucian Society had taken a firm root in the minds of men, and was fostered by the followers of Paracelsus, who, after having tried in vain to discover the House of the Holy Ghost, at last pretended that they were themselves Rosicrucians⁶, to all intents and purposes, and affirmed this in many publications. Thus the public were now in utter confusion.

If we examine the books which created so much excitement, we shall find them full of contradictory statements, which seem to show that what they relate is not history, but a mere fiction.

The "*Fama Fraternitatis*" states that the burial-place of Rosicrucians is to be kept secret, even from the brethren; and yet eight of these witnessed the death and burial of Christian Rosenkreuz. The fraternity seem to profess the Protestant religion a century before the Reformation; the fiction betrays itself in every single circumstance of the story.

It has been generally supposed that the author of the "*Fama*" and the "*Confessio Fraternitatis*" was a young Lutheran divine, Johann Valentine Andreae, who, in his youth,

⁶ Buhle, p. 189, "*Sie waren schon Rosenkreuzer.*" See also Figuier, "*L'Alchimie et les Alchimistes*," p. 262.

had written works of a similar tendency ; and if his character and opinions are properly estimated, there will be little doubt that he was the founder of Rosicrucianism.

Andreæ seems to have thought that the evils from which Germany was then suffering could be reformed by means of a secret society. The example of Luther's success as a reformer may have encouraged him ; and the project of a Rosicrucian Society was his first step. The popular ear was to be caught by an account of a secret fraternity, which was in possession of all the Eastern mysteries ; and by promising men wealth, long life, and the acquisition of occult science, he hoped to attract them to co-operate towards the elevation of human nature.

The name of the Rosy Cross is probably derived from his armorial bearings, which were a St. Andrew's Cross and four roses⁷. Many other derivations⁸ however have been given, and the name has been explained by Mosheim as signifying a "philosopher who makes gold;" but it must be remembered, that the Rosicrucians expressly declared that the making of gold was but a trifling object, *ein geringes Parergon*.

Andreæ soon found that his plan had failed. Many accepted the alchemy, but neglected all idea of a reformation of morals and religion. The most extravagant theories were propounded. One writer affirmed that Adam was the first Rosicrucian ; another, an alchemist, understood the three books allegorically, as describing the art of making gold. Michael Maier, who first introduced Rosicrucianism into England, declared that, like the Egyptians and Pythagoreans, the Rosicrucians exacted silence and secrecy from the initiated, but that those were in error who treated the fraternity as a fiction.

⁷ Hoszbach, "Andreæ und sein Zeitalter," p. 120, "Andreas Familien Petschaft aus einem Kreuz und vier Rosen bestand."

⁸ One derivation being from *Ros*, dew, and *Crux*, the latter being considered equivalent to *Lux*, light. See Renadot, "Conferences Publiques," iv. p. 87.

He speaks of the numbers whom the fraternity would not accept⁹.

But the ridicule of their antagonists became at length too powerful for the supporters of Rosicrucianism. Even Andreae, in his disappointment, strove to crush the idea of their existence¹; and the finishing stroke was given by the celebrated Tomaso Campanella, who showed that the Universal Reformation of the world "was nothing else than a literal translation of the 'Generale Riforma dell' Universo dai sette Savj della Grecia,'" in the Parnaso of Trajano Boccalini.

All this ridicule and opposition probably prevented the formation of any organized society in Germany.

Many of the learned men of the age ceased to believe in the existence of the fraternity. Des Cartes had sought to join it, but could not find any lodge of Rosicrucians. Leibnitz, though at first connected with a so-called Society of Rosicrucians at Nuremberg, shows in his letters that he believed Rosicrucianism to be a fiction. He writes, "Il me paroît que tout ce que l'on dit des Frères de la Croix de la Rose est une pure invention."

Orvius relates, in his "Occulta Philosophia," how he had been cheated by a pretended fraternity, who threatened him with death if he revealed their secrets, although none had ever been imparted to him². In Germany Rosicrucianism never recovered from the shock; in England it still exists under another name. It is asserted by Buhle, that a Rosicrucian college was actually established in England; of this there is

⁹ Michael Maier, "Silentium post Clamores," p. 77, "Innumeri adsunt—at non audiuntur nec videntur à magistris R. C. qui rosas ostentant, at crucem exhibent."

¹ In the "Turris Babel" Andreae says, "Satis superque hominibus illusum est. Eheu mortales! nihil est quod fraternitatem expectetis: fabula peracta est. Fama astruxit—Fama destruxit. Fama aiebat—Fama negat."

² Buhle, p. 232. "Secrets," says he, "which I kept, *wie die Weiber, die Nichts entdecken wo sie Nichts wissen*—as women do, who reveal nothing where they know nothing."

no direct proof; but if there was no such organized fraternity³, there was no lack of Rosicrucians. Many learned men of the seventeenth century were smitten with a mania for Alchemy and Cabalism; amongst these the two Nortons, John Pordage, and especially Robert Fludd, were indefatigable in the promulgation of their doctrines.

The latter, who was the friend of Michael Maier, was probably initiated early into Rosicrucianism; he is supposed to have written the "Apology" for the fraternity, which was printed but a few years after the first appearance of the "Fama Fraternitatis." To him has been attributed the real foundation of Freemasonry, from the Rosicrucianism of Valentine Andreae.

Fludd's "Apology" was attacked by Merseune, who asked where was the dwelling-place of the Rosicrucians, and by Gassendi, who ridiculed the belief in a secret brotherhood and philosophers. Fludd at first answered that they resided in the House of God, where Christ is the Corner Stone; but strangely enough, in his reply to Gassendi, he dropped the name Rosicrucian, as perhaps having become contemptible, and says, "Fratres R. C. olim sic dicti, quos nos hodiè *Sapientes* vocamus, omisso illo nomine (tanquam odioso miseris mortalibus velo ignorantiae obductis) et in oblivione hominum jam ferè sepulto⁴." "The brothers R. C., formerly so called, but whom we now term '*Sapientes*,' the earlier name being laid aside (as odious to wretched mortals covered with the veil of ignorance) and almost buried in oblivion." From this time they cease to be called Rosicrucians, and in the mean time receive the name of *wise* men. This, says Buhle, is the first step in the change from this fraternity to that of Freemasons.

The name of Masons may have been suggested by the story

³ The nearest approach to a Rosicrucian Fraternity seems to have been an Astrologers' Feast. See "The Life of Elias Ashmole," p. 310: "I being at the Astrologers' Feast, was chosen steward for the next year."

⁴ "Clavis Philosophiæ," p. 50.

of the House of the Holy Ghost in the "*Fama Fraternitatis*." This was no real house, though many sought for it as such, for Andreæ had plainly said that "it would remain invisible to the godless for ever".

The building was therefore allegorical, and represented the object of the Rosicrucians, that is to say, the secret wisdom, or, in their words, the *magic*, which had been transmitted from Adam to themselves through the Cabalists⁶. The spiritual knowledge of this was symbolized by Christ Himself as a rock, and as a building, of which He was the Corner Stone, and of which men were the living stones⁷.

In two remarkable passages we seem to have an explanation of the rise of the allegorical name *mason*, as applied to the former Rosicrucians, and the society was to be a fraternity, which should typically represent that Temple of the Holy Spirit, which it wished to erect in the minds of men⁸.

Although the precise date of the rise of Freemasonry from Rosicrucianism cannot be determined, it probably took place between the years 1633 and 1646.

The language of the Scriptures had caused the Rosicrucians to adopt symbols from the art of masonry, and the interest which they thus took in the attributes of true masons gradually led to some connexion between the two orders; and it was in the year 1646 that the first formal lodge of Freemasons was held in Masons' Hall, Basinghall-street, London. No doubt there had been private meetings previous to that date, and the

⁶ "*Fama Fraternitatis*," p. 33, the conclusion, "Es soll auch wohl unser Gebäu, für die gottlose Weltin Ewigkeit ohnberühret, unbesichtiget, und wohl gar verborgen bleiben. 'Sub umbrâ alarum tuarum, Jehova.'"

⁶ Buhle, "*Die Rosenkreuzer*," p. 258.

⁷ Fludd, "*Summum Bonum*," p. 37, "*Concludimus igitur quod Jesus sit templi humani lapis angularis—atque ex mortuis lapides vivi sint facti homines pii.*" And in another passage: "*Transmutemini de lapidibus mortuis in lapides vivos philosophicos.*"

⁸ "Nos docet Apostolus ad mysterii perfectionem vel sub agricolæ vel *architecti* typo pertingere." And again, "*Atque sub istiusmodi architecti typo nos monet propheta ut ædificemus domum sapientiæ.*"

annual Astrologers' Feast had to some extent paved the way for the new society. There is a Rosicrucian degree as well as a Templar's degree in Freemasonry, but the craft does not profess to derive its origin from the Rosicrucians. Yet the emblems and the objects of the two societies are similar; the myth of Solomon's Temple belongs to both, and there is nothing either in the ritual or purposes of Freemasonry, as established in the seventeenth century, which cannot be traced to the account of Christian Rosenkreuz and his society in the "*Fama Fraternitatis*." Mr. King⁹ has adopted the idea of Nicolai, that after the death of Charles I., many royalists, to conceal their designs, united with the Freemasons, who are said to have adopted signs and ceremonies expressive of their grief and of their hopes for the future.

There are certainly striking analogies between the historical events of the time and some of the symbols and myths of the masonic degrees, but the theory seems to rest on a slight foundation¹.

It is not our province to point out the good or evil of this fraternity, which flourishes at the present day, and which has had so much influence as the parent of modern Secret Societies, the Illuminati, the Carbonari, and other similar associations, all deriving their origin from Freemasonry. We may, however, say that the Freemasons of Great Britain have ever been excepted, even by the bitterest assailants of the craft, from the accusations which have been so lavishly brought against the continental lodges. The Abbé Barruel, who is violently opposed to Freemasonry, says, "England is full of upright men, who, as excellent citizens, are proud of being masons, and who may be distinguished from the others by ties which only appear to unite them more closely in the bonds of fraternal

⁹ King, "Gnostics and their Remains," p. 191. Nicolai, "Versuch über die Beschuldigungen der Tempelherren."

¹ Buhle, "Die Rosenkreuzer," p. 356.

affection." As they professedly have no political object, they seem to be in their present form nothing more than a charitable and social fraternity.

IX.

Thus have we imperfectly attempted to trace the history and doctrines of the Secret Fraternities of the Middle Ages. Many doubtful points must ever remain undetermined from the want of sufficient data, but their general character can at least be understood. In some we see an aspiration to ideal perfection, and a desire to obtain and preserve a higher degree of knowledge than that possessed by the rest of mankind; in others only the means which ambitious men have employed to gain their objects; in others an uprising against despotism and superstition; in almost all of them there is a more or less powerful antagonism to authority; in all of them mysticism exercises undoubted influence.

On the whole it cannot be denied that these Associations were useful during the periods in which they arose, for they taught the doctrine of the equality and fraternity of mankind; a doctrine which, although originally beneficial in its effects, has been perverted in modern times, and has sometimes sanctioned the most deplorable excesses.

It is difficult to believe, as many writers have asserted², that all these societies are merely the continuation of the mysteries of antiquity under modified forms; for they seem, in most instances, to have originated through the peculiar circumstances and tendencies of the different periods in which they have been established. No doubt their indirect influence on each other has been very great; in all of them the ceremonies of initiation are strikingly similar; and it is curious to observe how the symbols of the Gnostics, after having been

² Besides the authors cited on page 8, see Eckert, "Die Mysterien der Heidenkirche," who calls Freemasons *neue Manichäer*, new Manichæans.

communicated by the Sufis of Persia to the Templars, have descended to our days as the insignia of Freemasonry.

Under despotic governments secret political fraternities will still continue to exist, and their designs may be fraught with peril to the states in which they are founded; for the same means can be employed to overthrow a good as well as a bad government; but where the right of public discussion, and of association, is permitted, no such dangers are to be apprehended. In the Middle Ages, the erroneous idea prevailed that knowledge was to be carefully and secretly preserved, and not to be generally diffused; but now the age of mysticism is past, and the attempt to perpetuate the pretensions of earlier days is chimerical.

When civilization was rude and imperfect, Secret Fraternities may have fostered justice, and may have protected the weak; but the evils which are inseparable from such associations have scarcely been outweighed by their advantages; and if we find in them the germs of progress and of freedom, we also perceive that the instances are rare in which they have not rapidly degenerated from their original purpose.

THE END.





